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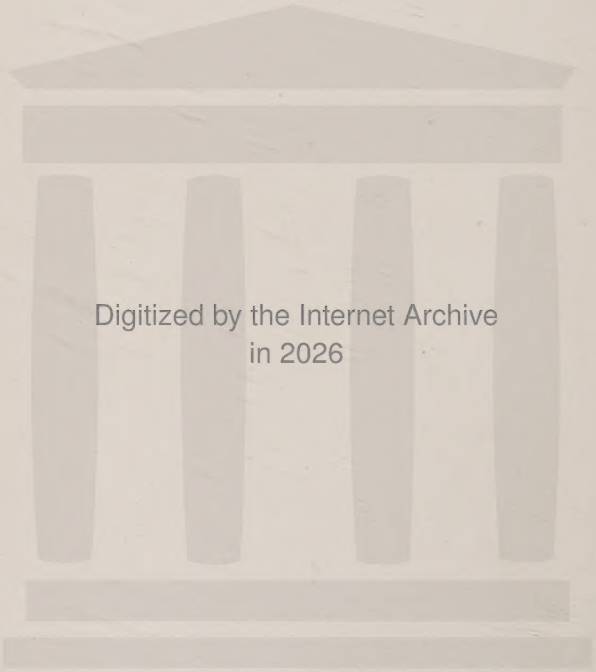

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STUDIES

IN

LITERATURE

BY

JOHN MORLEY

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THE contents of the present collection have all been in print before, either in the *Nineteenth Century* and *Fortnightly Review*, or in some other shape. I have to thank the proprietors of the two periodicals named for sanctioning the reproduction of my articles here.

J. M.

October 1890.

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WORDSWORTH.[1]

THE poet whose works are contained in the present volume was born in the little town of Cockermouth, in Cumberland, on April 7, 1770. He died at Rydal Mount, in the neighbouring county of Westmoreland, on April 23, 1850. In this long span of mortal years, events of vast and enduring moment shook the world. A handful of scattered and dependent colonies in the northern continent of America made themselves into one of the most powerful and beneficent of states. The ancient monarchy of France, and all the old ordering of which the monarchy had been the keystone, was overthrown, and it was not until after many a violent shock of arms, after terrible slaughter of men, after strange diplomatic combinations, after many

[1] Originally published as an Introduction to the new edition of Wordsworth's *Complete Poetical Works* (1888).

social convulsions, after many portentous mutations of empire, that Europe once more settled down for a season into established order and system. In England almost alone, after the loss of her great possessions across the Atlantic Ocean, the fabric of the State stood fast and firm. Yet here, too, in these eighty years, an old order slowly gave place to new. The restoration of peace, after a war conducted with extraordinary tenacity and fortitude, led to a still more wonderful display of ingenuity, industry, and enterprise, in the more fruitful field of commerce and of manufactures. Wealth, in spite of occasional vicissitudes, increased with amazing rapidity. The population of England and Wales grew from being seven and a half millions in 1770, to nearly eighteen millions in 1850. Political power was partially transferred from a territorial aristocracy to the middle and trading classes. Laws were made at once more equal and more humane. During all the tumult of the great war which for so many years bathed Europe in fire, through all the throes and agitations in which peace brought forth the new time, Wordsworth for half a century (1799-1850)

dwelt sequestered in unbroken composure and steadfastness in his chosen home amid the mountains and lakes of his native region, working out his own ideal of the high office of the Poet.

The interpretation of life in books and the development of imagination underwent changes of its own. Most of the great lights of the eighteenth century were still burning, though burning low, when Wordsworth came into the world. Pope, indeed, had been dead for six and twenty years, and all the rest of the Queen Anne men had gone. But Gray only died in 1771, and Goldsmith in 1774. Ten years later Johnson's pious and manly heart ceased to beat. Voltaire and Rousseau, those two diverse oracles of their age, both died in 1778. Hume had passed away two years before. Cowper was forty years older than Wordsworth, but Cowper's most delightful work was not produced until 1783. Crabbe, who anticipated Wordsworth's choice of themes from rural life, while treating them with a sterner realism, was virtually his contemporary, having been born in 1754, and dying in 1832. The two great names of his own date were Scott and Coleridge, the first born in

1771, and the second a year afterwards. Then a generation later came another new and illustrious group. Byron was born in 1788, Shelley in 1792, and Keats in 1795. Wordsworth was destined to see one more orb of the first purity and brilliance rise to its place in the poetic firmament. Tennyson's earliest volume of poems was published in 1830, and *In Memoriam*, one of his two masterpieces, in 1850. Any one who realises for how much these famous names will always stand in the history of human genius, may measure the great transition that Wordsworth's eighty years witnessed in some of men's deepest feelings about art and life and "the speaking face of earth and heaven."

Here, too, Wordsworth stood isolated and apart. Scott and Southey were valued friends, but, as has been truly said, he thought little of Scott's poetry, and less of Southey's. Of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* he said, "There is something in the madness of this man which interests me more than the sanity of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." Coleridge was the only member of the shining company with whom he ever had any real intimacy of mind, for whom

he ever nourished real deference and admiration as one "unrelentingly possessed by thirst of greatness, love, and beauty," and in whose intellectual power, as the noble lines in the Sixth Book of the *Prelude* so gorgeously attest, he took the passionate interest of a man at once master, disciple, and friend. It is true to say, as Emerson says, that Wordsworth's genius was the great exceptional fact of the literature of his period. But he had no teachers nor inspirers save nature and solitude.

Wordsworth was the son of a solicitor, and all his early circumstances were homely, unpretentious, and rather straitened. His mother died when he was eight years old, and when his father followed her five years later, two of his uncles provided means for continuing at Cambridge the education which had been begun in the rural grammar-school of Hawkshead. It was in 1787 that he went up to St. John's College. He took his Bachelor's degree at the beginning of 1791, and there his connection with the university ended.

For some years after leaving Cambridge,

Wordsworth let himself drift. He did not feel good enough for the Church; he shrank from the law; fancying that he had talents for command, he thought of being a soldier. Meanwhile, he passed a short time desultorily in London. Towards the end of 1791, through Paris, he passed on to Orleans and Blois, where he made some friends and spent most of a year. He returned to Paris in October 1792. France was no longer standing on the top of golden hours. The September massacres filled the sky with a lurid flame. Wordsworth still retained his ardent faith in the Revolution, and was even ready, though no better than "a landsman on the deck of a ship struggling with a hideous storm," to make common cause with the Girondists. But the prudence of friends at home forced him back to England before the beginning of the terrible year of '93. With his return closed that first survey of its inheritance, which most serious souls are wont to make in the fervid prime of early manhood.

It would be idle to attempt any commentary on the bare facts that we have just recapitulated; for Wordsworth himself has clothed them with

their full force and meaning in the *Prelude*. This record of the growth of a poet's mind, told by the poet himself with all the sincerity of which he was capable, is never likely to be popular. Of that, as of so much more of his poetry, we must say that, as a whole, it has not the musical, harmonious, sympathetic quality which seizes us in even the prose of such a book as Rousseau's *Confessions*. Macaulay thought the *Prelude* a poorer and more tiresome *Excursion*, with the old flimsy philosophy about the effect of scenery on the mind, the old crazy mystical metaphysics, and the endless wilderness of twaddle; still he admits that there are some fine descriptions and energetic declamations. All Macaulay's tastes and habits of mind made him a poor judge of such a poet as Wordsworth. He valued spirit, energy, pomp, stateliness of form and diction, and actually thought Dryden's fine lines about to-morrow being falser than the former day equal to any eight lines in Lucretius. But his words truly express the effect of the *Prelude* on more vulgar minds than his own. George Eliot, on the other hand, who had the inward eye that was not among Macaulay's gifts, found the *Prelude*

full of material for a daily liturgy, and it is easy to imagine how she fondly lingered, as she did, over such a thought as this—

> "There is
> One great society alone on earth :
> The noble Living and the noble Dead."

There is, too, as may be found imbedded even in Wordsworth's dullest work, many a line of the truest poetical quality, such as that on Newton's statue in the silent Chapel of Trinity College—

> "The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought alone."

Apart, however, from beautiful lines like this, and from many noble passages of high reflection set to sonorous verse, this remarkable poem is in its whole effect unique in impressive power, as a picture of the advance of an elect and serious spirit from childhood and school-time, through the ordeal of adolescence, through close contact with stirring and enormous events, to that decisive stage when it has found the sources of its strength, and is fully and finally prepared to put its temper to the proof.

The three Books that describe the poet's residence in France have a special and a striking

value of their own. Their presentation of the phases of good men's minds as the successive scenes of the Revolution unfolded themselves has real historic interest. More than this, it is an abiding lesson to brave men how to bear themselves in hours of public stress. It portrays exactly that mixture of persevering faith and hope with firm and reasoned judgment, with which I like to think that Turgot, if he had lived, would have confronted the workings of the Revolutionary power. Great masters in many kinds have been inspired by the French Revolution. Human genius might seem to have exhausted itself in the burning political passion of Burke, in the glowing melodrama of fire and tears of Carlyle, Michelet, Hugo; but the ninth, tenth, and eleventh Books of the *Prelude*, by their strenuous simplicity, their deep truthfulness, their slowfooted and inexorable transition from ardent hope to dark imaginations, sense of woes to come, sorrow for human kind, and pain of heart, breathe the very spirit of the great catastrophe. There is none of the ephemeral glow of the political exhortation, none of the tiresome falsity of the dithyramb in history.

Wordsworth might well wish that some dramatic tale, endued with livelier shapes and flinging out less guarded words, might set forth the lessons of his experience. The material was fitting. The story of these three Books has something of the severity, the self-control, the inexorable necessity of classic tragedy, and like classic tragedy it has a noble end. The dregs and sour sediment that reaction from exaggerated hope is so apt to stir in poor natures had no place here. The French Revolution made the one crisis in Wordsworth's mental history, the one heavy assault on his continence of soul, and when he emerged from it all his greatness remained to him. After a long spell of depression, bewilderment, mortification, and sore disappointment, the old faith in new shapes was given back.

> "Nature's self,
> By all varieties of human love
> Assisted, led me back through opening day
> To those sweet counsels between head and heart
> Whence grew that genuine knowledge, fraught with peace,
> Which, through the later sinkings of this cause,
> Hath still upheld me and upholds me now."

It was six years after his return from France

before Wordsworth finally settled down in the scenes with which his name and the power of his genius were to be for ever associated. During this interval it was that two great sources of personal influence were opened to him. He entered upon that close and beloved companionship with his sister, which remained unbroken to the end of their days; and he first made the acquaintance of Coleridge. The character of Dorothy Wordsworth has long taken its place in the gallery of admirable and devoted women who have inspired the work and the thoughts of great men. "She is a woman, indeed," said Coleridge, "in mind I mean, and heart; for her person is such that if you expected to see a pretty woman, you would think her rather ordinary; if you expected to see an ordinary woman, you would think her pretty." To the solidity, sense, and strong intelligence of the Wordsworth stock she added a grace, a warmth, a liveliness peculiarly her own. Her nature shines transparent in her letters, in her truly admirable journal, and in every report that we have of her. Wordsworth's own feelings for her, and his sense of the debt that he owed to her faithful affection and eager mind, he has placed on lasting record.

The intimacy with Coleridge was, as has been said, Wordsworth's one strong friendship, and must be counted among the highest examples of that generous relation between great writers. Unlike in the quality of their genius, and unlike in force of character and the fortunes of life, they remained bound to one another by sympathies that neither time nor harsh trial ever extinguished. Coleridge had left Cambridge in 1794, had married, had started various unsuccessful projects for combining the improvement of mankind with the earning of an income, and was now settled in a small cottage at Nether Stowey, in Somersetshire, with an acre and a half of land, from which he hoped to raise corn and vegetables enough to support himself and his wife, as well as to feed a couple of pigs on the refuse. Wordsworth and his sister were settled at Racedown, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. In 1797 they moved to Alfoxden, in Somersetshire, their principal inducement to the change being Coleridge's society. The friendship bore fruit in the production of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, mainly the work of Wordsworth, but containing no less notable a contribution from Coleridge than the

Ancient Mariner. The two poets only received thirty guineas for their work, and the publisher lost his money. The taste of the country was not yet ripe for Wordsworth's poetic experiment.

Immediately after the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*, the two Wordsworths and Coleridge started from Yarmouth for Hamburg. Coleridge's account in Satyrane's Letters, published in the *Biographia Literaria*, of the voyage and of the conversation between the two English poets and Klopstock, is worth turning to. The pastor told them that Klopstock was the German Milton. "A very German Milton indeed," they thought. The Wordsworths remained for four wintry months at Goslar, in Saxony, while Coleridge went on to Ratzeburg, Göttingen, and other places, mastering German, and "delving in the unwholesome quicksilver mines of metaphysic depths." Wordsworth made little way with the language, but worked diligently at his own verse.

When they came back to England, Wordsworth and his sister found their hearts turning with irresistible attraction to their own familiar countryside. They at last made their way to Grasmere. The opening book of the *Recluse*,

which is published for the first time in the present volume, describes in fine verse the emotions and the scene. The face of this delicious vale is not quite what it was when

> "Cottages of mountain stone
> Clustered like stars some few, but single most,
> And lurking dimly in their shy retreats,
> Or glancing at each other cheerful looks
> Like separated stars with clouds between."

But it is foolish to let ourselves be fretted by the villa, the hotel, and the tourist. We may well be above all this in a scene that is haunted by a great poetic shade. The substantial features and elements of beauty still remain, the crags and woody steeps, the lake, "its one green island and its winding shores; the multitude of little rocky hills." Wordsworth was not the first poet to feel its fascination. Gray visited the Lakes in the autumn of 1769, and coming into the vale of Grasmere from the north-west, declared it to be one of the sweetest landscapes that art ever attempted to imitate, an unsuspected paradise of peace and rusticity. We cannot indeed compare the little crystal mere, set like a gem in the verdant circle of the hills, with

the grandeur and glory of Lucerne, or the radiant gladness and expanse of Como: yet it has an inspiration of its own, to delight, to soothe, to fortify, and to refresh.

"What want we? have we not perpetual streams,
Warm woods, and sunny hills, and fresh green fields,
And mountains not less green, and flocks and herds,
And thickets full of songsters, and the voice
Of lordly birds, an unexpected sound
Heard now and then from morn to latest eve,
Admonishing the man who walks below
Of solitude and silence in the sky.
These have we, and a thousand nooks of earth
Have also these, but nowhere else is found,
Nowhere (or is it fancy?) can be found
The one sensation that is here; . . . 'tis the sense
Of majesty, and beauty, and repose,
A blended holiness of earth and sky,
Something that makes this individual spot,
This small abiding-place of many men,
A termination, and a last retreat,
A centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
A whole without dependence or defect,
Made for itself, and happy in itself,
Perfect contentment, Unity entire."

In the Grasmere vale Wordsworth lived for half a century, first in a little cottage at the northern corner of the lake, and then (1813) in a more commodious house at Rydal Mount

at the southern end, on the road to Ambleside. In 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson, of Penrith, and this completed the circle of his felicity. Mary, he once said, was to his ear the most musical and most truly English in sound of all the names we have. The name was of harmonious omen. The two beautiful sonnets that he wrote on his wife's portrait long years after, when "morning into noon had passed, noon into eve," show how much her large heart and humble mind had done for the blessedness of his home.

Their life was almost more simple than that of the dalesmen their neighbours. "It is my opinion," ran one of his oracular sayings to Sir George Beaumont, "that a man of letters, and indeed all public men of every pursuit, should be severely frugal." Means were found for supporting the modest home out of two or three small windfalls bequeathed by friends or relatives, and by the time that children had begun to come Wordsworth was raised to affluence by obtaining the post of distributor of stamps for Westmoreland and part of Cumberland. His life was happily devoid of

striking external incident. Its essential part lay in meditation and composition.

He was surrounded by friends. Southey had made a home for himself and his beloved library a few miles over the hills, at Keswick. De Quincey, with his clever brains and shallow character, took up his abode in the cottage which Wordsworth had first lived in at Grasmere. Coleridge, born the most golden genius of them all, came to and fro in those fruitless unhappy wanderings which consumed a life that once promised to be so rich in blessing and in glory. In later years Dr. Arnold built a house at Fox How, attracted by the Wordsworths and the scenery; and other lesser lights came into the neighbourhood. "Our intercourse with the Wordsworths," Arnold wrote on the occasion of his first visit in 1832, "was one of the brightest spots of all; nothing could exceed their friendliness, and my almost daily walks with him were things not to be forgotten. Once and once only we had a good fight about the Reform Bill during a walk up Greenhead Ghyll to see the unfinished sheepfold, recorded in *Michael*. But I am sure that

our political disagreement did not at all interfere with our enjoyment of each other's society; for I think that in the great principles of things we agreed very entirely." It ought to be possible, for that matter, for magnanimous men, even if they do not agree in the great principles of things, to keep pleasant terms with one another for more than one afternoon's walk. Many pilgrims came, and the poet seems to have received them with cheerful equanimity. Emerson called upon him in 1833, and found him plain, elderly, whitehaired, not prepossessing. "He led me out into his garden, and showed me the gravel walk in which thousands of his lines were composed. He had just returned from Staffa, and within three days had made three sonnets on Fingal's Cave, and was composing a fourth when he was called in to see me. He said, 'If you are interested in my verses, perhaps you will like to hear these lines.' I gladly assented, and he recollected himself for a few moments, and then stood forth and repeated, one after the other, the three entire sonnets with great animation. This recitation was so unlooked for and surprising—he, the old

Wordsworth, standing apart, and reciting to me in a garden-walk, like a schoolboy declaiming—that I at first was near to laugh; but recollecting myself, that I had come thus far to see a poet, and he was chanting poems to me, I saw that he was right and I was wrong, and gladly gave myself up to hear. He never was in haste to publish; partly because he corrected a good deal. . . . He preferred such of his poems as touched the affections to any others; for whatever is didactic—what theories of society, and so on—might perish quickly, but whatever combined a truth with an affection was good to-day and good for ever" (*English Traits*, ch. i.).

Wordsworth was far too wise to encourage the pilgrims to turn into abiding sojourners in his chosen land. Clough has described how, when he was a lad of eighteen (1837), with a mild surprise he heard the venerable poet correct the tendency to exaggerate the importance of flowers and fields, lakes, waterfalls, and scenery. "People come to the Lakes," said Wordsworth, "and are charmed with a particular spot, and build a house, and find themselves discontented, forgetting that these things are only the sauce and garnish of life."

In spite of a certain hardness and stiffness, Wordsworth must have been an admirable companion for anybody capable of true elevation of mind. The unfortunate Haydon says, with his usual accent of enthusiasm, after a saunter at Hampstead, "Never did any man so beguile the time as Wordsworth. His purity of heart, his kindness, his soundness of principle, his information, his knowledge, and the intense and eager feelings with which he pours forth all he knows, affect, interest, and enchant one" (*Autobiog.* i. 298, 384). The diary of Crabb Robinson, the correspondence of Charles Lamb, the delightful autobiography of Mrs. Fletcher, and much less delightfully the autobiography of Harriet Martineau, all help us to realise by many a trait Wordsworth's daily walk and conversation. Of all the glimpses that we get, from these and many other sources, none are more pleasing than those of the intercourse between Wordsworth and Scott. They were the two manliest and most wholesome men of genius of their time. They held different theories of poetic art, but their affection and esteem for one another never varied, from the early days when Scott and his

young wife visited Wordsworth in his cottage at Grasmere, down to that sorrowful autumn evening (1831) when Wordsworth and his daughter went to Abbotsford to bid farewell to the wondrous potentate, then just about to start on his vain search for new life, followed by "the might of the whole earth's good wishes."

Of Wordsworth's demeanour and physical presence, De Quincey's account, silly, coxcombical, and vulgar, is the worst; Carlyle's, as might be expected from his magical gift of portraiture, is the best. Carlyle cared little for Wordsworth's poetry, had a real respect for the antique greatness of his devotion to Poverty and Peasanthood, recognised his strong intellectual powers and strong character, but thought him rather dull, bad-tempered, unproductive, and almost wearisome, and found his divine reflections and unfathomabilities stinted, scanty, uncertain, palish. From these and many other disparagements, one gladly passes to the picture of the poet as he was in the flesh at a breakfast-party given by Henry Taylor, at a tavern in St. James's Street, in 1840. The subject of the talk was Literature, its laws, practices, and observances :—"He talked

well in his way; with veracity, easy brevity and force; as a wise tradesman would of his tools and workshop, and as no unwise one could. His voice was good, frank, and sonorous, though practically clear, distinct, and forcible, rather than melodious; the tone of him business-like, sedately confident; no discourtesy, yet no anxiety about being courteous: a fine wholesome rusticity, fresh as his mountain breezes, sat well on the stalwart veteran, and on all he said and did. You would have said he was a usually taciturn man, glad to unlock himself to audience sympathetic and intelligent, when such offered itself. His face bore marks of much, not always peaceful, meditation; the look of it not bland or benevolent, so much as close, impregnable, and hard; a man *multa tacere loquive paratus*, in a world where he had experienced no lack of contradictions as he strode along! The eyes were not very brilliant, but they had a quiet clearness; there was enough of brow, and well shaped; rather too much of cheek ('horse-face,' I have heard satirists say), face of squarish shape and decidedly longish, as I think the head itself was (its 'length' going horizontal); he was

large-boned, lean, but still firm-knit, tall, and strong-looking when he stood; a right good old steel-gray figure, with rustic simplicity and dignity about him, and a vivacious *strength* looking through him which might have suited one of those old steel-gray *Markgrafs* [Graf= *Grau*, 'Steel-gray'] whom Henry the Fowler set up to ward the 'marches,' and do battle with the intrusive heathen, in a stalwart and judicious manner."

Whoever might be his friends within an easy walk, or dwelling afar, the poet knew how to live his own life. The three fine sonnets headed *Personal Talk*, so well known, so warmly accepted in our better hours, so easily forgotten in hours not so good between pleasant levities and grinding preoccupations, show us how little his neighbours had to do with the poet's genial seasons of "smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous thought."

For those days Wordsworth was a considerable traveller. Between 1820 and 1837 he made long tours abroad, to Switzerland, to Holland, to Belgium, to Italy. In other years he visited Wales, Scotland, and Ireland. He was no me-

chanical tourist, admiring to order and marvelling by regulation ; and he confessed to Mrs. Fletcher that he fell asleep before the Venus de Medici at Florence. But the product of these wanderings is to be seen in some of his best sonnets, such as the first on Calais Beach, the famous one on Westminster Bridge, the second of the two on Bruges, where "the Spirit of Antiquity mounts to the seat of grace within the mind—a deeper peace than that in deserts found"—and in some other fine pieces.

In weightier matters than mere travel, Wordsworth showed himself no mere recluse. He watched the great affairs then being transacted in Europe with the ardent interest of his youth, and his sonnets to Liberty, commemorating the attack by France upon the Swiss, the fate of Venice, the struggle of Hofer, the resistance of Spain, give no unworthy expression to some of the best of the many and varied motives that animated England in her long struggle with Bonaparte. The sonnet to Toussaint l'Ouverture concludes with some of the noblest lines in the English language. The strong verses on the expected death of Mr. Fox are alive with a

magnanimous public spirit that goes deeper than the accidents of political opinion. In his young days he had sent Fox a copy of the *Lyrical Ballads*, with a long letter indicating his sense of Fox's great and generous qualities. Pitt he admits that he could never regard with complacency. "I believe him, however," he said, "to have been as disinterested a man, and as true a lover of his country, as it was possible for so ambitious a man to be. His first wish (though probably unknown to himself) was that his country should prosper under his administration; his next that it should prosper. Could the order of these wishes have been reversed, Mr. Pitt would have avoided many of the grievous mistakes into which, I think, he fell." "You always went away from Burke," he once told Haydon, "with your mind filled; from Fox with your feelings excited; and from Pitt with wonder at his having had the power to make the worse appear the better reason."

Of the poems composed under the influence of that best kind of patriotism which ennobles local attachments by associating them with the lasting elements of moral grandeur and heroism it is

needless to speak. They have long taken their place as something higher even than literary classics. As years began to dull the old penetration of a mind which had once approached, like other youths, the shield of human nature from the golden side, and had been eager to "clear a passage for just government," Wordsworth lost his interest in progress. Waterloo may be taken for the date at which his social grasp began to fail, and with it his poetic glow. He opposed Catholic emancipation as stubbornly as Eldon, and the Reform Bill as bitterly as Croker. For the practical reforms of his day, even in education, for which he had always spoken up, Wordsworth was not a force. His heart clung to England as he found it. "This concrete attachment to the scenes about him," says Mr. Myers, "had always formed an important element in his character. Ideal politics, whether in Church or State, had never occupied his mind, which sought rather to find its informing principles embodied in the England of his own day." This flowed, we may suppose, from Burke. In a passage in the seventh Book of the *Prelude*, he describes. in lines a little prosaic but quite true,

how he sat, saw, and heard, not unthankful nor uninspired, the great orator

> "While he forewarns, denounces, launches forth
> Against all systems built on abstract rights."

The Church, as conceived by the spirit of Laud, and described by Hooker's voice, was the great symbol of the union of high and stable institution with thought, faith, right living, and "sacred religion, mother of form and fear." As might be expected from such a point of view, the church pieces, to which Wordsworth gave so much thought, are, with few exceptions, such as the sonnet on *Seathwaite Chapel*, formal, hard, and very thinly enriched with spiritual graces or unction. They are ecclesiastical, not religious. In religious poetry, the Church of England finds her most affecting voice, not in Wordsworth, but in the *Lyra Innocentium* and the *Christian Year*. Wordsworth abounds in the true devotional cast of mind, but less than anywhere else does it show in his properly ecclesiastical verse.

It was perhaps natural that when events no longer inspired him, Wordsworth should have turned with new feelings towards the classic, and discovered a virtue in classic form to which his

own method had hitherto made him a little blind. Towards the date of Waterloo, he read over again some of the Latin writers, in attempting to prepare his son for college. He even at a later date set about a translation of the *Æneid* of Virgil, but the one permanent result of the classic movement in his mind is *Laodamia*. Earlier in life he had translated some books of Ariosto at the rate of a hundred lines a day, and he even attempted fifteen of the sonnets of Michael Angelo, but so much meaning is compressed into so little room in those pieces that he found the difficulty insurmountable. He had a high opinion of the resources of the Italian language. The poetry of Dante and of Michael Angelo, he said, proves that if there be little majesty and strength in Italian verse, the fault is in the authors and not in the tongue.

Our last glimpse of Wordsworth in the full and peculiar power of his genius is the Ode *Composed on an evening of extraordinary splendour and beauty*. It is the one exception to the critical dictum that all his good work was done in the decade between 1798 and 1808. He lived for more than thirty years after this fine com-

position. But he added nothing more of value to the work that he had already done. The public appreciation of it was very slow. The most influential among the critics were for long hostile and contemptuous. Never at any time did Wordsworth come near to such popularity as that of Scott or of Byron. Nor was this all. For many years most readers of poetry thought more even of *Lalla Rookh* than of the *Excursion*. While Scott, Byron, and Moore were receiving thousands of pounds, Wordsworth received nothing. Between 1830 and 1840 the current turned in Wordsworth's direction, and when he received the honour of a doctor's degree at the Oxford Commemoration in 1839, the Sheldonian theatre made him the hero of the day. In the spring of 1843 Southey died, and Sir Robert Peel pressed Wordsworth to succeed him in the office of Poet-Laureate. "It is a tribute of respect," said the Minister, "justly due to the first of living poets." But almost immediately the light of his common popularity was eclipsed by Tennyson, as it had earlier been eclipsed by Scott, by Byron, and in some degree by Shelley. Yet his fame among those who know, among

competent critics with a right to judge, to-day stands higher than it ever stood. Only two writers have contributed so many lines of daily popularity and application. In the handbooks of familiar quotations Wordsworth fills more space than anybody save Shakespeare and Pope. He exerted commanding influence over great minds that have powerfully affected our generation. "I never before," said George Eliot in the days when her character was forming itself (1839), "met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I should like them," and her reverence for Wordsworth remained to the end. J. S. Mill has described how important an event in his life was his first reading of Wordsworth. "What made his poems a medicine for my state of mind was that they expressed not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling and of thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty. I needed to be made to feel that there was real permanent happiness in tranquil contemplation. Wordsworth taught me this, not only without turning away from, but with greatly increased interest in the common feelings and common destiny of human beings"

(*Autobiog.*, 148). This effect of Wordsworth on Mill is the very illustration of the phrase of a later poet of our own day, one of the most eminent and by his friends best beloved of all those whom Wordsworth had known, and on whom he poured out a generous portion of his own best spirit:—

> "Time may restore us in his course
> Goethe's sage mind and Byron's force.
> But where will Europe's latter hour
> Again find Wordsworth's healing power?"

It is the power for which Matthew Arnold found this happy designation that compensates us for that absence of excitement of which the heedless complain in Wordsworth's verse—excitement so often meaning mental fever, hysterics, distorted passion, or other fitful agitation of the soul.

Pretensions are sometimes advanced as to Wordsworth's historic position, which involve a mistaken view of literary history. Thus, we are gravely told by the too zealous Wordsworthian that the so-called poets of the eighteenth century were simply men of letters; they had various accomplishments and great general ability,

but their thoughts were expressed in prose, or in mere metrical diction, which passed current as poetry without being so. Yet Burns belonged wholly to the eighteenth century (1759-96), and no verse-writer is so little literary as Burns, so little prosaic; no writer more truly poetic in melody, diction, thought, feeling, and spontaneous song. It was Burns who showed Wordsworth's own youth "How verse may build a princely throne on humble truth." Nor can we understand how Cowper is to be set down as simply a man of letters. We may, too, if we please, deny the name of poetry to Collins's tender and pensive *Ode to Evening*; but we can only do this on critical principles, which would end in classing the author of *Lycidas* and *Comus*, of the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, as a writer of various accomplishments and great general ability, but at bottom simply a man of letters and by no means a poet. It is to Gray, however, that we must turn for the distinctive character of the best poetry of the eighteenth century. With reluctance we will surrender the Pindaric Odes, though not without risking the observation that some of Wordsworth's own criticism on Gray is as

narrow and as much beside the mark as Jeffrey's on the *Excursion*. But the *Ode on Eton College* is not to have grudged to it the noble name and true quality of poetry, merely because, as one of Johnson's most unfortunate criticisms expresses it, the ode suggests nothing to Gray which every beholder does not equally think and feel. To find beautiful and pathetic language, set to harmonious numbers, for the common impressions of meditative minds, is no small part of the poet's task. That part has never been achieved by any poet in any tongue with more complete perfection and success than in the immortal *Elegy*, of which we may truly say that it has for nearly a century and a half given to greater multitudes of men more of the exquisite pleasure of poetry than any other single piece in all the glorious treasury of English verse. It abounds, as Johnson says, "with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo." These moving commonplaces of the human lot Gray approached through books and studious contemplation; not, as Wordsworth approached them, by daily contact with the lives and habit of men and the forces

and magical apparitions of external nature. But it is a narrow view to suppose that the men of the eighteenth century did not look through the literary conventions of the day to the truths of life and nature behind them. The conventions have gone, or are changed, and we are all glad of it. Wordsworth effected a wholesome deliverance when he attacked the artificial diction, the personifications, the allegories, the antitheses, the barren rhymes and monotonous metres, which the reigning taste had approved. But while welcoming the new freshness, sincerity, and direct and fertile return on nature, that is a very bad reason why we should disparage poetry so genial, so simple, so humane, and so perpetually pleasing, as the best verse of the rationalistic century.

What Wordsworth did was to deal with themes that had been partially handled by precursors and contemporaries, in a larger and more devoted spirit, with wider amplitude of illustration, and with the steadfastness and persistency of a religious teacher. "Every great poet is a teacher," he said; "I wish to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." It may be doubted

whether his general proposition is at all true, and whether it is any more the essential business of a poet to be a teacher than it was the business of Handel, Beethoven, or Mozart. They attune the soul to high states of feeling; the direct lesson is often as nought. But of himself no view could be more sound. He is a teacher, or he is nothing. "To console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and sincerely virtuous" —that was his vocation; to show that the mutual adaptation of the external world and the inner mind is able to shape a paradise from the "simple produce of the common day"—that was his high argument.

Simplification was, as I have said elsewhere, the keynote of the revolutionary time. Wordsworth was its purest exponent, but he had one remarkable peculiarity, which made him, in England at least, not only its purest but its greatest. While leading men to pierce below the artificial and conventional to the natural man and natural life, as Rousseau did, Wordsworth still cherished

the symbols, the traditions, and the great institutes of social order. Simplification of life and thought and feeling was to be accomplished without summoning up the dangerous spirit of destruction and revolt. Wordsworth lived with nature, yet waged no angry railing war against society. The chief opposing force to Wordsworth in literature was Byron. Whatever he was in his heart, Byron in his work was drawn by all the forces of his character, genius, and circumstances to the side of violent social change, and hence the extraordinary popularity of Byron in the continental camp of emancipation. Communion with nature is in Wordsworth's doctrine the school of duty. With Byron nature is the mighty consoler and the vindicator of the rebel.

A curious thing, which we may note in passing, is that Wordsworth, who clung fervently to the historic foundations of society as it stands, was wholly indifferent to history; while Byron, on the contrary, as the fourth canto of *Childe Harold* is enough to show, had at least the sentiment of history in as great a degree as any poet that ever lived, and has given to it by far the most magnificent expression. No doubt, it was his-

tory on its romantic, rather than its philosophic or its political side.

On Wordsworth's exact position in the hierarchy of sovereign poets, a deep difference of estimate still divides even the most excellent judges. Nobody now dreams of placing him so low as the *Edinburgh Reviewers* did, nor so high as Southey placed him when he wrote to the author of *Philip van Artevelde* in 1829 that a greater poet than Wordsworth there never has been nor ever will be. An extravagance of this kind was only the outburst of generous friendship. Coleridge deliberately placed Wordsworth "nearest of all modern writers to Shakespeare and Milton, yet in a kind perfectly unborrowed and his own." Arnold, himself a poet of rare and memorable quality, declares his firm belief that the poetical performance of Wordsworth is, after that of Shakespeare and Milton, undoubtedly the most considerable in our language from the Elizabethan age to the present time. Dryden, Pope, Gray, Cowper, Goldsmith, Burns, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats—"Wordsworth's name deserves to stand, and will finally stand, above them all." Mr. Myers, also a poet, and

the author of a volume on Wordsworth as much distinguished by insight as by admirable literary grace and power, talks of "a Plato, a Dante, a Wordsworth," all three in a breath, as stars of equal magnitude in the great spiritual firmament. To Mr. Swinburne, on the contrary, all these panegyrical estimates savour of monstrous and intolerable exaggeration. Amid these contentions of celestial minds it will be safest to content ourselves with one or two plain observations in the humble positive degree, without hurrying into high and final comparatives and superlatives.

One admission is generally made at the outset. Whatever definition of poetry we fix upon, whether that it is the language of passion or imagination formed into regular numbers; or, with Milton, that it should be "simple, sensuous, impassioned;" in any case there are great tracts in Wordsworth which, by no definition and on no terms, can be called poetry. If we say with Shelley, that poetry is what redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man, and is the record of the best and happiest moments of the best and happiest minds, then are we bound

to agree that Wordsworth records too many moments that are not specially good or happy, that he redeems from decay frequent visitations that are not from any particular divinity in man, and treats them all as very much on a level. Mr. Arnold is undoubtedly right in his view that, to be receivable as a classic, Wordsworth must be relieved of a great deal of the poetical baggage that now encumbers him.

The faults and hindrances in Wordsworth's poetry are obvious to every reader. For one thing, the intention to instruct, to improve the occasion, is too deliberate and too hardly pressed. "We hate poetry," said Keats, "that has a palpable design upon us. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive." Charles Lamb's friendly remonstrance on one of Wordsworth's poems is applicable to more of them: "The instructions conveyed in it are too direct; they don't slide into the mind of the reader while he is imagining no such matter."

Then, except the sonnets and half a score of the pieces where he reaches his topmost height, there are few of his poems that are not too long, and it often happens even that no degree of

reverence for the teacher prevents one from finding passages of almost unbearable prolixity. A defence was once made by a great artist for what, to the unregenerate mind, seemed the merciless tardiness of movement in one of Goethe's romances, that it was meant to impress on his readers the slow march and the tedium of events in human life. The lenient reader may give Wordsworth the advantage of the same ingenious explanation. We may venture on a counsel which is more to the point, in warning the student that not seldom in these blocks of afflicting prose, suddenly we come upon some of the profoundest and most beautiful passages that the poet ever wrote. In deserts of preaching we find, almost within sight of one another, delightful oases of purest poetry. Besides being prolix, Wordsworth is often cumbrous; has often no flight; is not liquid, is not musical. He is heavy and self-conscious with the burden of his message. How much at his best he is, when, as in the admirable and truly Wordsworthian poem of *Michael*, he spares us a sermon and leaves us the story. Then, he is apt to wear a somewhat stiff-cut garment of solem-

nity, when not solemnity, but either sternness or sadness, which are so different things, would seem the fitter mood. In truth Wordsworth hardly knows how to be stern, as Dante or Milton was stern; nor has he the note of plangent sadness which strikes the ear in men as morally inferior to him as Rousseau, Keats, Shelley, or Coleridge; nor has he the Olympian air with which Goethe delivered sage oracles. This mere solemnity is specially oppressive in some parts of the *Excursion* —the performance where we best see the whole poet, and where the poet most absolutely identifies himself with his subject. Yet, even in the midst of these solemn discoursings, he suddenly introduces an episode in which his peculiar power is at its height. There is no better instance of this than the passage in the second Book of the *Excursion,* where he describes with a fidelity, at once realistic and poetic, the worn-out almsman, his patient life and sorry death, and then the unimaginable vision in the skies, as they brought the ancient man down through dull mists from the mountain ridge to die. These hundred and seventy lines are like the landscape in which they were composed; you

can no more appreciate the beauty of the one by a single or a second perusal, than you can the other in a scamper through the vale on the box of the coach. But any lover of poetry who will submit himself with leisure and meditation to the impressions of the story, the pity of it, the naturalness of it, the glory and the mystic splendours of the indifferent heavens, will feel that here indeed is the true strength which out of the trivial raises expression for the pathetic and the sublime.

Apart, however, from excess of prolixity and of solemnity, can it be really contended that in purely poetic quality—in aerial freedom and space, in radiant purity of light or depth and variety of colour, in penetrating and subtle sweetness of music, in supple mastery of the instrument, in vivid spontaneity of imagination, in clean-cut sureness of touch—Wordsworth is not surpassed by men who were below him in weight and greatness? Even in his own field of the simple and the pastoral has he touched so sweet and spontaneous a note as Burns's *Daisy*, or the *Mouse*? When men seek immersion or absorption in the atmosphere of pure poesy,

without lesson or moral, or anything but delight of fancy and stir of imagination, they will find him less congenial to their mood than poets not worthy to loose the latchet of his shoe in the greater elements of his art. In all these comparisons, it is not merely Wordsworth's theme and motive and dominant note that are different, the skill of hand is different, and the musical ear and the imaginative eye.

To maintain or to admit so much as this, however, is not to say the last word. The question is whether Wordsworth, however unequal to Shelley in lyric quality, to Coleridge or to Keats in imaginative quality, to Burns in tenderness, warmth, and that humour which is so nearly akin to pathos, to Byron in vividness and energy, yet possesses excellences of his own which place him in other respects above these master-spirits of his time. If the question is to be answered affirmatively, it is clear that only in one direction must we look. The trait that really places Wordsworth on an eminence above his poetic contemporaries, and ranks him, as the ages are likely to rank him, on a line just short of the greatest of all time, is his direct appeal to will

and conduct. "There is volition and self-government in every line of his poetry, and his best thoughts come from his steady resistance to the ebb and flow of ordinary desires and regrets. He contests the ground inch by inch with all despondent and indolent humours, and often, too, with movements of inconsiderate and wasteful joy" (*R. H. Hutton*). That would seem to be his true distinction and superiority over men to whom more had been given of fire, passion, and ravishing music. Those who deem the end of poetry to be intoxication, fever, or rainbow dreams, can care little for Wordsworth. If its end be not intoxication, but on the contrary a search from the wide regions of imagination and feeling for elements of composure deep and pure, and of self-government in a far loftier sense than the merely prudential, then Wordsworth has a gift of his own in which he was approached by no poet of his time. Scott's sane and humane genius, with much the same aims, yet worked with different methods. He once remonstrated with Lockhart for being too apt to measure things by some reference to literature. "I have read books enough," said Scott, "and

observed and conversed with enough of eminent and splendidly cultivated minds; but I assure you, I have heard higher sentiments from the lips of poor uneducated men and women, when exerting the spirit of severe yet gentle heroism under difficulties and afflictions, or speaking their simple thoughts as to circumstances in the lot of friends and neighbours, than I ever yet met with out of the pages of the Bible. We shall never learn to respect our real calling and destiny, unless we have taught ourselves to consider everything as moonshine compared with the education of the heart." This admirable deliverance of Scott's is, so far as it goes, eminently Wordsworthian; but Wordsworth went higher and further, striving not only to move the sympathies of the heart, but to enlarge the understanding, and exalt and widen the spiritual vision, all with the aim of leading us towards firmer and austerer self-control.

Certain favourers of Wordsworth answer our question with a triumphant affirmative, on the strength of some ethical, or metaphysical, or theological system which they believe themselves to find in him. But is it credible that poets can

permanently live by systems? Or is not system, whether ethical, theological, or philosophical, the heavy lead of poetry? Lucretius is indisputably one of the mighty poets of the world, but Epicureanism is not the soul of that majestic muse. So with Wordsworth. Thought is, on the whole, predominant over feeling in his verse, but a prevailing atmosphere of deep and solemn reflection does not make a system. His theology and his ethics, and his so-called Platonical metaphysics, have as little to do with the power of his poetry over us, as the imputed Arianism or any other aspect of the theology of *Paradise Lost* has to do with the strength and the sublimity of Milton, and his claim to a high perpetual place in the hearts of men. It is best to be entirely sceptical as to the existence of system and ordered philosophy in Wordsworth. When he tells us that "one impulse from a vernal wood may teach you more of man, of moral evil and of good, than all the sages can," such a proposition cannot be seriously taken as more than a half-playful sally for the benefit of some too bookish friend. No impulse from a vernal wood can teach us anything at all of moral evil and of good. When

he says that it is his faith, "that every flower enjoys the air it breathes," and that when the budding twigs spread out their fan to catch the air, he is compelled to think "that there was pleasure there," he expresses a charming poetic fancy and no more, and it is idle to pretend to see in it the fountain of a system of philosophy. In the famous *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, the poet doubtless does point to a set of philosophic ideas, more or less complete; but the thought from which he sets out, that our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting, and that we are less and less able to perceive the visionary gleam, less and less alive to the glory and the dream of external nature, as infancy recedes further from us, is, with all respect for the declaration of Mr. Ruskin to the contrary, contrary to notorious fact, experience, and truth. It is a beggarly conception, no doubt, to judge as if poetry should always be capable of a prose rendering; but it is at least fatal to the philosophic pretension of a line or a stanza if, when it is fairly reduced to prose, the prose discloses that it is nonsense, and there is at least one stanza of the great *Ode* that this doom would assuredly await.

Wordsworth's claim, his special gift, his lasting contribution, lies in the extraordinary strenuousness, sincerity, and insight with which he first idealises and glorifies the vast universe around us, and then makes of it, not a theatre on which men play their parts, but an animate presence, intermingling with our works, pouring its companionable spirit about us, and "breathing grandeur upon the very humblest face of human life." This twofold and conjoint performance, consciously and expressly—perhaps only too consciously—undertaken by a man of strong inborn sensibility to natural impressions, and systematically carried out in a lifetime of brooding meditation and active composition, is Wordsworth's distinguishing title to fame and gratitude. In "words that speak of nothing more than what we are," he revealed new faces of nature; he dwelt on men as they are, men themselves; he strove to do that which has been declared to be the true secret of force in art, to make the trivial serve the expression of the sublime. "Wordsworth's distinctive work," Mr. Ruskin has justly said (*Modern Painters*, iii. 293), "was a war with pomp and pretence, and a display of the majesty

of simple feelings and humble hearts, together with high reflective truth in his analysis of the courses of politics and ways of men; without these, his love of nature would have been comparatively worthless."

Yet let us not forget that he possessed the gift which to an artist is the very root of the matter. He saw Nature truly, he saw her as she is, and with his own eyes. The critic whom I have just quoted boldly pronounces him "the keenest eyed of all modern poets for what is deep and essential in nature." When he describes the daisy, casting the beauty of its star-shaped shadow on the smooth stone, or the boundless depth of the abysses of the sky, or the clouds made vivid as fire by the rays of light, every touch is true, not the copying of a literary phrase, but the result of direct observation.

It is true that Nature has sides to which Wordsworth was not energetically alive—Nature "red in tooth and claw." He was not energetically alive to the blind and remorseless cruelties of life and the world. When in early spring he heard the blended notes of the birds, and saw the budding twigs and primrose tufts, it grieved

him, amid such fair works of nature, to think "what man has made of man." As if nature itself, excluding the conscious doings of that portion of nature which is the human race, and excluding also nature's own share in the making of poor Man, did not abound in raking cruelties and horrors of her own. "*Edel sei der Mensch*," sang Goethe in a noble psalm, "*Hülfreich und gut, Denn das allein unterscheidet ihn, Von allen Wesen die wir kennen.*" "*Let man be noble, helpful, and good, for that alone distinguishes him from all beings that we know. No feeling has nature: to good and bad gives the sun his light, and for the evildoer as for the best shine moon and stars.*" That the laws which nature has fixed for our lives are mighty and eternal, Wordsworth comprehended as fully as Goethe, but not that they are laws pitiless as iron. Wordsworth had not rooted in him the sense of Fate—of the inexorable sequences of things, of the terrible chain that so often binds an awful end to some slight and trivial beginning.

This optimism or complacency in Wordsworth will be understood if we compare his spirit and treatment with that of the illustrious French painter whose subjects and whose life were in

some ways akin to his own. Millet, like Wordsworth, went to the realities of humble life for his inspiration. The peasant of the great French plains and the forest was to him what the Cumbrian dalesman was to Wordsworth. But he saw the peasant differently. "You watch figures in the fields," said Millet, "digging and delving with spade or pick. You see one of them from time to time straightening his loins, and wiping his face with the back of his hand. Thou shalt eat thy bread in the sweat of thy brow. Is that the gay lively labour in which some people would have you believe? Yet it is there that for me you must seek true humanity and great poetry. They say that I deny the charm of the country; I find in it far more than charms, I find infinite splendours. I see in it, just as they do, the little flowers of which Christ said that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. I see clearly enough the sun as he spreads his splendour amid the clouds. None the less do I see on the plain, all smoking, the horses at the plough. I see in some stony corner a man all worn out, whose *han han* have been heard ever since daybreak—

trying to straighten himself a moment to get breath." The hardness, the weariness, the sadness, the ugliness, out of which Millet's consummate skill made pictures that affect us like strange music, were to Wordsworth not the real part of the thing. They were all absorbed in the thought of nature as a whole, wonderful, mighty, harmonious, and benign.

We are not called upon to place great men of his stamp as if they were collegians in a class-list. It is best to take with thankfulness and admiration from each man what he has to give. What Wordsworth does is to assuage, to reconcile, to fortify. He has not Shakespeare's richness and vast compass, nor Milton's sublime and unflagging strength, nor Dante's severe, vivid, ardent force of vision. Probably he is too deficient in clear beauty of form and in concentrated power to be classed by the ages among these great giants. We cannot be sure. We may leave it to the ages to decide. But Wordsworth, at any rate, by his secret of bringing the infinite into common life, as he evokes it out of common life, has the skill to lead us, so long as we yield ourselves to his influence, into inner moods of settled peace,

to touch "the depth and not the tumult of the soul," to give us quietness, strength, steadfastness, and purpose, whether to do or to endure. All art or poetry that has the effect of breathing into men's hearts, even if it be only for a space, these moods of settled peace, and strongly confirming their judgment and their will for good,—whatever limitations may be found besides, however prosaic may be some or much of the detail,—is great art and noble poetry, and the creator of it will always hold, as Wordsworth holds, a sovereign title to the reverence and gratitude of mankind.

APHORISMS.[1]

Since I accepted the honour of the invitation to deliver the opening address of your course, I have found no small difficulty in settling down on an appropriate subject. I half wrote a discourse on modern democracy,—how the rule of numbers is to be reconciled with the rule of sage judgment, and the passion for liberty and equality is to be reconciled with sovereign regard for law, authority, and order; and how our hopes for the future are to be linked to wise reverence for tradition and the past. But your secretary had emphatically warned me off all politics, and I feared that however carefully I might be on my guard against every reference to the burning questions of the hour, yet the clever eyes of political charity would be sure

[1] An Address delivered before the Edinburgh Philosophical Institution, *November* 11, 1887.

to spy out party innuendoes in the most innocent deliverances of purely abstract philosophy. Then for a day or two I lingered over a subject in a little personal incident. One Saturday night last summer I found myself dining with an illustrious statesman on the Welsh border, and on the Monday following I was seated under the acacias by the shore of the Lake of Geneva, where Gibbon, a hundred years ago almost to the day, had, according to his own famous words, laid down his pen after writing the last lines of his last page, and there under a serene sky, with the silver orb of the moon reflected from the waters, and amid the silence of nature, felt his joy at the completion of an immortal task, dashed by melancholy that he had taken everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion. It was natural that I should meditate on the contrast that might be drawn between great literary performance and great political performance, between the making of history and the writing of it,—a contrast containing matter enough not only for one, but for a whole series of edifying and instructive discourses. But there were difficulties here

too, and the edifying discourse remains, like many another, incomplete.

So I am going to ask you after all to pass a tranquil hour with me in pondering a quiet chapter in the history of books. There is a loud cry in these days for clues that shall guide the plain man through the vast bewildering labyrinth of printed volumes. Everybody calls for hints what to read, and what to look out for in reading. Like all the rest of us, I have often been asked for a list of the hundred best books, and the other day a gentleman wrote to me to give him by return of post that far more difficult thing—a list of the three best books in the world. Both the hundred and the three are a task far too high for me; but perhaps you will let me try to indicate what, among so much else, is one of the things best worth hunting for in books, and one of the quarters of the library where you may get on the scent. Though tranquil, it will be my fault if you find the hour dull, for this particular literary chapter concerns life, manners, society, conduct, human nature, our aims, our ideals, and all besides that is most animated and

most interesting in man's busy chase after happiness and wisdom.

What is wisdom? That sovereign word, as has often been pointed out, is used for two different things. It may stand for knowledge, learning, science, systematic reasoning; or it may mean, as Coleridge has defined it, common sense in an uncommon degree; that is to say, the unsystematic truths that come to shrewd, penetrating, and observant minds, from their own experience of life and their daily commerce with the world, and that is called the wisdom of life, or the wisdom of the world, or the wisdom of time and the ages. The Greeks had two words for these two kinds of wisdom: one for the wise who scaled the heights of thought and knowledge; another for those who, without logical method, technical phraseology, or any of the parade of the Schools, whether "Academics old and new, Cynic, Peripatetic, the sect Epicurean, or Stoic severe," held up the mirror to human nature, and took good counsel as to the ordering of character and of life.

Mill, in his little fragment on Aphorisms, has said that in the first kind of wisdom every age

in which science flourishes ought to surpass the ages that have gone before. In knowledge and methods of science each generation starts from the point at which its predecessor left off; but in the wisdom of life, in the maxims of good sense applied to public and to private conduct, there is, said Mill, a pretty nearly equal amount in all ages.

If this seem doubtful to any one, let him think how many of the shrewdest moralities of human nature are to be found in writings as ancient as the apocryphal Book of the Wisdom of Solomon and of Jesus the Son of Sirach; as *Æsop's Fables*; as the oracular sentences that are to be found in Homer and the Greek dramatists and orators; as all that immense host of wise and pithy saws which, to the number of between four and five thousand, were collected from all ancient literature by the industry of Erasmus in his great folio of Adages. As we turn over these pages of old time, we almost feel that those are right who tell us that everything has been said, that the thing that has been is the thing that shall be, and there is no new thing under the sun. Even so, we are happily

not bound to Schopenhauer's gloomy conclusion (*Werke*, v. 332), that "The wise men of all times have always said the same, and the fools, that is the immense majority, of all times, have always done the same, that is to say, the opposite of what the wise have said; and that is why Voltaire tells us that we shall leave this world just as stupid and as bad as we found it when we came here."

It is natural that this second kind of wisdom, being detached and unsystematic, should embody itself in the short and pregnant form of proverb, sentence, maxim, and aphorism. The essence of aphorism is the compression of a mass of thought and observation into a single saying. It is the very opposite of dissertation and declamation; its distinction is not so much ingenuity, as good sense brought to a point; it ought to be neither enigmatical nor flat, neither a truism on the one hand, nor a riddle on the other. These wise sayings, said Bacon, the author of some of the wisest of them, are not only for ornament, but for action and business, having a point or edge, whereby knots in business are pierced and discovered. And he applauds Cicero's description

of such sayings as saltpits,—that you may extract salt out of them, and sprinkle it where you will. They are the guiding oracles which man has found out for himself in that great business of ours, of learning how to be, to do, to do without, and to depart. Their range extends from prudential kitchen maxims, such as Franklin set forth in the sayings of Poor Richard about thrift in time and money, up to such great and high moralities of life as are the prose maxims of Goethe,—just as Bacon's Essays extend from precepts as to building and planting, up to solemn reflections on truth, death, and the vicissitudes of things. They cover the whole field of man as he is, and life as it is, not of either as they ought to be; friendship, ambition, money, studies, business, public duty, in all their actual laws and conditions as they are, and not as the ideal moralist may wish that they were.

The substance of the wisdom of life must be commonplace, for the best of it is the result of the common experience of the world. Its most universal and important propositions must in a certain sense be truisms. The road has been so broadly trodden by the hosts who have travelled

along it, that the main rules of the journey are clear enough, and we all know that the secret of breakdown and wreck is seldom so much an insufficient knowledge of the route, as imperfect discipline of the will. The truism, however, and the commonplace may be stated in a form so fresh, pungent, and free from triviality, as to have all the force of new discovery. Hence the need for a caution, that few maxims are to be taken without qualification. They seek sharpness of impression by excluding one side of the matter and exaggerating another, and most aphorisms are to be read as subject to all sorts of limits, conditions, and corrections.

It has been said that the order of our knowledge is this: that we know best, first, what we have divined by native instinct; second, what we have learned by experience of men and things; third, what we have learned not in books, but by books—that is, by the reflections that they suggest; fourth, last and lowest, what we have learned in books or with masters. The virtue of an aphorism comes under the third of these heads: it conveys a portion of a truth with such point as to set us thinking on what remains. Mon-

taigne, who delighted in Plutarch, and kept him ever on his table, praises him in that besides his long discourses, "there are a thousand others, which he has only touched and glanced upon, where he only points with his finger to direct us which way we may go if we will, and contents himself sometimes with only giving one brisk hit in the nicest article of the question, from whence we are to grope out the rest." And this is what Plutarch himself is driving at, when he warns young men that it is well to go for a light to another man's fire, but by no means to tarry by it, instead of kindling a torch of their own.

Grammarians draw a distinction between a maxim and an aphorism, and tell us that while an aphorism only states some broad truth of general bearing, a maxim, besides stating the truth, enjoins a rule of conduct as its consequence. For instance, to say that "There are some men with just imagination enough to spoil their judgment" is an aphorism. But there is action as well as thought in such sayings as this: "'Tis a great sign of mediocrity to be always reserved in praise"; or in this of M. Aurelius, "When thou wishest to give thyself delight, think of the

excellences of those who live with thee; for instance, of the energy of one, the modesty of another, the liberal kindness of a third." Again, according to this distinction of the word, we are to give the name of aphorism to Pascal's saying that "Most of the mischief in the world would never happen, if men would only be content to sit still in their parlours."[1] But we should give the name of maxim to the profound and admirably humane counsel of a philosopher of a very different school, that "If you would love mankind, you should not expect too much from them."

But the distinction is one without much difference; we need not labour it nor pay it further attention. Aphorism or maxim, let us remember that this wisdom of life is the true salt of literature; that those books, at least in prose, are most nourishing which are most richly stored with it; and that it is one of the main objects, apart from the mere acquisition of knowledge, which men ought to seek in the reading of books.

[1] La Bruyère also says:—"All mischief comes from our not being able to be alone; hence play, luxury, dissipation, wine, ignorance, calumny, envy, forgetfulness of one's self and of God."

A living painter has said, that the longer he works, the more does he realise how very little anybody except the trained artist actually perceives in the natural objects constantly before him; how blind men are to impressions of colour and light and form, which would be full of interest and delight, if people only knew how to see them. Are not most of us just as blind to the thousand lights and shades in the men and women around us? We live in the world as we live among fellow-inmates in a hotel, or fellow-revellers at a masquerade. Yet this, to bring knowledge of ourselves and others "home to our business and our bosoms," is one of the most important parts of culture.

Some prejudice is attached in generous minds to this wisdom of the world as being egotistical, poor, unimaginative, of the earth earthy. Since the great literary reaction at the end of the last century, men have been apt to pitch criticism of life in the high poetic key. They have felt with Wordsworth:—

"The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged, and reverenced with love,
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit
Diffused through time and space, with aid derived

Of evidence from monuments, erect,
Prostrate, or leaning towards their common rest
In earth, the widely-scattered wreck sublime
Of vanished nations."

Then again, there is another cause for the passing eclipse of interest in wisdom of the world. Extraordinary advances have been made in ordered knowledge of the various stages of the long prehistoric dawn of human civilisation. The man of the flint implement and the fire-drill, who could only count up to five, and who was content to live in a hut like a beehive, has drawn interest away from the man of the market and the parlour. The literary passion for primitive times and the raw material of man has thrust polished man, the manufactured article, into a secondary place. All this is in the order of things. It is fitting enough that we should pierce into the origins of human nature. It is right, too, that the poets, the ideal interpreters of life, should be dearer to us than those who stop short with mere deciphering of what is real and actual. The poet has his own sphere of the beautiful and the sublime. But it is no less true that the enduring weight

of historian, moralist, political orator, or preacher depends on the amount of the wisdom of life that is hived in his pages. They may be admirable by virtue of other qualities, by learning, by grasp, by majesty of flight; but it is his moral sentences on mankind or the State that rank the prose writer among the sages. These show that he has an eye for the large truths of action, for the permanent bearings of conduct, and for things that are for the guidance of all generations. What is it that makes Plutarch's Lives "the pasture of great souls," as they were called by one who was herself a great soul? Because his aim was much less to tell a story than, as he says, "to decipher the man and his nature"; and in deciphering the man, to strike out pregnant and fruitful thoughts on all men. Why was it worth while for Mr. Jowett, the other day, to give us a new translation of Thucydides' history of the Peloponnesian War? And why is it worth your while, at least to dip in a serious spirit into its pages? Partly, because the gravity and concision of Thucydides are of specially wholesome example in these days of over-coloured and over-voluminous

narrative; partly, because he knows how to invest the wreck and overthrow of those small states with the pathos and dignity of mighty imperial fall; but most of all, for the sake of the wise sentences that are sown with apt but not unsparing hand through the progress of the story. Well might Gray ask his friend whether Thucydides' description of the final destruction of the Athenian host at Syracuse was not the finest thing he ever read in his life; and assuredly the man who can read that stern tale without admiration, pity, and awe may be certain that he has no taste for noble composition, and no feeling for the deepest tragedy of mortal things. But it is the sagacious sentences in the speeches of Athenians, Corinthians, Lacedæmonians, that do most of all to give to the historian his perpetuity of interest to every reader with the rudiments of a political instinct, and make Thucydides as modern as if he had written yesterday.

Tacitus belongs to a different class among the great writers of the world. He had, beyond almost any author of the front rank that has ever lived, the art of condensing his thought

and driving it home to the mind of the reader with a flash. Beyond almost anybody, he suffered from what a famous writer of aphorisms in our time has described as "the cursed ambition to put a whole book into a page, a whole page into a phrase, and the phrase into a word." But the moral thought itself in Tacitus mostly belongs less to the practical wisdom of life, than to sombre poetic indignation, like that of Dante, against the perversities of men and the blindness of fortune.

Horace's Epistles are a mine of genial, friendly, humane observation. Then there is none of the ancient moralists to whom the modern, from Montaigne, Charron, Ralegh, Bacon, downwards, owe more than to Seneca. Seneca has no spark of the kindly warmth of Horace; he has not the animation of Plutarch; he abounds too much in the artificial and extravagant paradoxes of the Stoics. But, for all that, he touches the great and eternal commonplaces of human occasion—friendship, health, bereavement, riches, poverty, death—with a hand that places him high among the wise masters of life. All through the ages men tossed in the beating

waves of circumstance have found more abundantly in the essays and letters of Seneca than in any other secular writer words of good counsel and comfort. And let this fact not pass, without notice of the light that it sheds on the fact of the unity of literature, and of the absurdity of setting a wide gulf between ancient or classical literature and modern, as if under all dialects the partakers in Græco-Roman civilisation, whether in Athens, Rome, Paris, Weimar, Edinburgh, London, Dublin, were not the heirs of a great common stock of thought as well as of speech.

I certainly do not mean anything so absurd as that the moralities, whether major or minor, whether affecting the foundation of conduct or the surface of manners, remain fixed. On the contrary, one of the most interesting things in literature is to mark the shifts and changes in men's standards. For instance, Boswell tells a curious story of the first occasion on which Johnson met Sir Joshua Reynolds. Two ladies of the company were regretting the death of a friend to whom they owed great obligations. Reynolds observed that they had at any rate

the comfort of being relieved from a debt of gratitude. The ladies were naturally shocked at this singular alleviation of their grief, but Johnson defended it in his clear and forcible manner, and, says Boswell, "was much pleased with the mind, the fair view of human nature, that it exhibited, like some of the reflections of Rochefoucauld." On the strength of it he went home with Reynolds, supped with him, and was his friend for life. No moralist with a reputation to lose would like to back Reynolds's remark in the nineteenth century.

Our own generation in Great Britain has been singularly unfortunate in the literature of aphorism. One too famous volume of proverbial philosophy had immense vogue, but it is so vapid, so wordy, so futile, as to have a place among the books that dispense with parody. Then, rather earlier in the century, a clergyman, who ruined himself by gambling, ran away from his debts to America, and at last blew his brains out, felt peculiarly qualified to lecture mankind on moral prudence. He wrote a little book in 1820, called *Lacon; or Many Things in Few Words, addressed to those who think.* It is an

awful example to anybody who is tempted to try his hand at an aphorism. Thus, "Marriage is a feast where the grace is sometimes better than the dinner." I had made some other extracts from this unhappy sage, but you will thank me for having thrown them into the fire. Finally, a great authoress of our time was urged by a friend to fill up a gap in our literature by composing a volume of Thoughts: the result was that least felicitous of performances, *Theophrastus Such*. One living writer of genius has given us a little sheaf of subtly-pointed maxims in the *Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, and perhaps he will one day divulge to the world the whole contents of Sir Austin Feverel's unpublished volume, *The Pilgrim's Scrip*.

Yet the wisdom of life has its full part in our literature. Keen insight into peculiarities of individual motive, and concentrated interest in the play of character, shine not merely in Shakespeare, whose mighty soul, as Hallam says, was saturated with moral observation, nor in the brilliant verse of Pope. For those who love meditative reading on the ways and destinies of men, we have Burton and Fuller and Sir

Thomas Browne in one age, and Addison, Johnson, and the rest of the Essayists, in another. Sir Thomas Overbury's *Characters*, written in the Baconian age, are found delightful by some; but for my own part, though I have striven to follow the critic's golden rule, to have preferences but no exclusions, Overbury has for me no savour. In the great art of painting moral portraits, or character-writing, the characters in Clarendon, or in Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, are full of life, vigour, and coherency, and are intensely attractive to read. I cannot agree with those who put either Clarendon or Burnet on a level with the characters in St. Simon or the Cardinal de Retz: there is a subtlety of analysis, a searching penetration, a breadth of moral comprehension, in the Frenchmen, which I do not find, nor, in truth, much desire to find, in our countrymen. A homelier hand does well enough for homelier men. Nevertheless, such characters as those of Falkland, or Chillingworth, by Clarendon, or Burnet's very different Lauderdale, are worth a thousand battle-pieces, cabinet plots, or parliamentary combinations, of which we never can

be sure that the narrator either knew or has told the whole story. It is true that these characters have not the strange quality which some one imputed to the writing of Tacitus, that it seems to put the reader himself and the secrets of his own heart into the confessional. It is in the novel that, in this country, the faculty of observing social man and his peculiarities has found its most popular instrument. The great novel, not of romance or adventure, but of character and manners, from the mighty Fielding, down, at a long interval, to Thackeray, covers the field that in France is held, and successfully held, against all comers, by her maxim-writers, like La Rochefoucauld, and her character-writers, like La Bruyère. But the literature of aphorism contains one English name of magnificent and immortal lustre—the name of Francis Bacon. Bacon's essays are the unique masterpiece in our literature of this oracular wisdom of life, applied to the scattered occasions of men's existence. The Essays are known to all the world; but there is another and perhaps a weightier performance of Bacon's which is less known, or not known at all, except to students

here and there. I mean the second chapter of the eighth book of his famous treatise, *De Augmentis.* It has been translated into pithy English, and is to be found in the fifth volume of the great edition of Bacon, by Spedding and Ellis.

In this chapter, among other things, he composes comments on between thirty and forty of what he calls the Aphorisms or Proverbs of Solomon, which he truly describes as containing, besides those of a theological character, "not a few excellent civil precepts and cautions, springing from the inmost recesses of wisdom, and extending to much variety of occasions." I know not where else to find more of the salt of common sense in an uncommon degree than in Bacon's terse comments on the Wise King's terse sentences, and in the keen, sagacious, shrewd wisdom of the world, lighted up by such brilliance of wit and affluence of illustration, in the pages that come after them.

This sort of wisdom was in the taste of the time; witness Ralegh's *Instructions to his Son,* and that curious collection "of political and polemical aphorisms grounded on authority and experience," which he called by the name of the

Cabinet Council. Harrington's *Political Aphorisms*, which came a generation later, are not moral sentences; they are a string of propositions in political theory, breathing a noble spirit of liberty, though too abstract for practical guidance through the troubles of the day. But Bacon's admonitions have a depth and copiousness that are all his own. He says that the knowledge of advancement in life, though abundantly practised, had not been sufficiently handled in books, and so he here lays down the precepts for what he calls the *Architecture of Fortune.* They constitute the description of a man who is politic for his own fortune, and show how he may best shape a character that will attain the ends of fortune.

First, A man should accustom his mind to judge of the proportion and value of all things as they conduce to his fortune and ends.

Second, Not to undertake things beyond his strength, nor to row against the stream.

Third, Not to wait for occasions always, but sometimes to challenge and induce them, according to that saying of Demosthenes: "In the same manner as it is a received principle that

the general should lead the army, so should wise men lead affairs," causing things to be done which they think good, and not themselves waiting upon events.

Fourth, Not to take up anything which of necessity forestalls a great quantity of time, but to have this sound ever ringing in our ears: "Time is flying—time that can never be retrieved."

Fifth, Not to engage one's-self too peremptorily in anything, but ever to have either a window open to fly out at, or a secret way to retire by.

Sixth, To follow that ancient precept, not construed to any point of perfidiousness, but only to caution and moderation, that we are to treat our friend as if he might one day be a foe, and our foe as if he should one day be friend.

All these Bacon called the good arts, as distinguished from the evil arts that had been described years before by Machiavelli in his famous book *The Prince,* and also in his *Discourses.* Bacon called Machiavelli's sayings depraved and pernicious, and a corrupt wisdom, as indeed they are. He was conscious that his own maxims, too, stood in some need of elevation and of correction, for he winds up with wise warnings

against being carried away by a whirlwind or tempest of ambition; by the general reminder that all things are vanity and vexation of spirit, and the particular reminder that, "Being without well-being is a curse, and the greater being, the greater curse," and that "all virtue is most rewarded, and all wickedness most punished in itself"; by the question whether this incessant, restless, and, as it were, Sabbathless pursuit of fortune, leaves time for holier duties, and what advantage it is to have a face erected towards heaven, with a spirit perpetually grovelling upon earth, eating dust like a serpent; and finally, he says that it will not be amiss for men, in this eager and excited chase of fortune, to cool themselves a little with that conceit of Charles v. in his instructions to his son, that "Fortune hath somewhat of the nature of a woman, who, if she be too closely wooed, is commonly the further off."

There is Baconian humour as well as a curious shrewdness in such an admonition as that which I will here transcribe, and there are many like it:—

"It is therefore no unimportant attribute of prudence in a man to be able to set forth to advantage before

others, with grace and skill, his virtues, fortunes, and merits (which may be done without arrogance or breeding disgust); and again, to cover artificially his weaknesses, defects, misfortunes, and disgraces; dwelling upon the former and turning them to the light, sliding from the latter or explaining them away by apt interpretations and the like. Tacitus says of Mucianus, the wisest and most active politician of his time, 'That he had a certain art of setting forth to advantage everything he said or did.' And it requires indeed some art, lest it become wearisome and contemptible; but yet it is true that ostentation, though carried to the first degree of vanity, is rather a vice in morals than in policy. For as it is said of calumny, 'Calumniate boldly, for some of it will stick,' so it may be said of ostentation (except it be in a ridiculous degree of deformity), 'Boldly sound your own praises, and some of them will stick.' It will stick with the more ignorant and the populace, though men of wisdom may smile at it; and the reputation won with many will amply countervail the disdain of a few. . . . And surely no small number of those who are of a solid nature, and who, from the want of this ventosity, cannot spread all sail in pursuit of their own honour, suffer some prejudice and lose dignity by their moderation."

Nobody need go to such writings as these for moral dignity or moral energy. They have no place in that nobler literature, from Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius downwards, which lights up the young soul with generous aims, and fires

it with the love of all excellence. Yet the most heroic cannot do without a dose of circumspection. The counsels of old Polonius to Laertes are less sublime than Hamlet's soliloquy, but they have their place. Bacon's chapters are a manual of circumspection, whether we choose to give to circumspection a high or a low rank in the list of virtues. Bacon knew of the famous city which had three gates, and on the first the horseman read inscribed, "Be bold"; and on the second gate yet again, "Be bold, and evermore be bold"; and on the third it was written, "Be not too bold."

This cautious tone had been brought about by the circumstances of the time. Government was strict; dissent from current opinions was dangerous; there was no indifference and hardly any tolerance; authority was suspicious and it was vindictive. When the splendid genius of Burke rose like a new sun into the sky, the times were happier, and nowhere in our literature does a noble prudence wear statelier robes than in the majestic compositions of Burke.

Those who are curious to follow the literature of aphorism into Germany, will, with the mighty

exceptions of Goethe and Schiller, find but a parched and scanty harvest. The Germans too often justify the unfriendly definition of an aphorism as a form of speech that wraps up something quite plain in words that turn it into something very obscure. As old Fuller says, the writers have a hair hanging to the nib of their pen. Their shortness does not prevent them from being tiresome. They recall the French wit to whom a friend showed a distich: "Excellent," he said; "but isn't it rather spun out?"

Lichtenberg, a professor of physics, who was also a considerable hand at satire a hundred years ago, composed a collection of sayings, not without some wheat amid much chaff. A later German writer, of whom I will speak in a moment or two, Schopenhauer, has some excellent remarks on Self-reflection, and on the difference between those who think for themselves and those who think for other people; between genuine Philosophers, who look at things first hand for their own sake, and Sophists, who look at words and books for the sake of making an appearance before the world, and seek their happiness in what they hope to get from others:

he takes Herder for an example of the Sophist, and Lichtenberg for the true Philosopher. It is true that we hear the voice of the Self-thinker, and not the mere Book-philosopher, if we may use for once those uncouth compounds, in such sayings as these:—

"People who never have any time are the people who do least."

"The utmost that a weak head can get out of experience is an extra readiness to find out the weaknesses of other people."

"Over-anxiously to feel and think what one could have done, is the very worst thing one can do."

"He who has less than he desires, should know that he has more than he deserves."

"Enthusiasts without capacity are the really dangerous people."

This last, by the way, recalls a saying of the great French reactionary, De Bonald, which is never quite out of date: "Follies committed by the sensible, extravagances uttered by the clever, crimes perpetrated by the good,—there is what makes revolutions."

Radowitz was a Prussian soldier and statesman, who died in 1853, after doing enough to convince men since that the revolution of 1848 produced no finer mind. He left among other

things two or three volumes of short fragmentary pieces on politics, religion, literature, and art. They are intelligent and elevated, but contain hardly anything to our point to-night, unless it be this,—that what is called Stupidity springs not at all from mere want of understanding, but from the fact that the free use of a man's understanding is hindered by some definite vice : Frivolity, Envy, Dissipation, Covetousness, all these darling vices of fallen man,—these are at the bottom of what we name Stupidity. This is true enough, but it is not so much to the point as the saying of a highly judicious aphorist of my own acquaintance, that "Excessive anger against human stupidity is itself one of the most provoking of all forms of stupidity."

Another author of aphorisms of the Goethe period was Klinger, a playwriter, who led a curious and varied life in camps and cities, who began with a vehement enthusiasm for the sentimentalism of Rousseau, and ended, as such men often end, with a hard and stubborn cynicism. He wrote *Thoughts on different Subjects of the World and Literature*, which are intelligent and masculine. if they are not particularly pungent

in expression. One of them runs—"He who will write interestingly must be able to keep heart and reason in close and friendliest connection. The heart must warm the reason, and reason must in turn blow on the embers if they are to burst into flame." This illustrates what an aphorism should not be. Contrast its clumsiness with the brevity of the famous and admirable saying of Vauvenargues, that "great thoughts come from the heart."

Schopenhauer gave to one of his minor works the name of *Aphorismen zu Lebens-Weisheit*, "Aphorisms for the Wisdom of Life," and he put to it, by way of motto, Chamfort's saying, "Happiness is no easy matter; 'tis very hard to find it within ourselves, and impossible to find it anywhere else." Schopenhauer was so well read in European literature, he had such natural alertness of mind, and his style is so pointed, direct, and wide-awake, that these detached discussions are interesting and most readable; but for the most part discussions they are, and not aphorisms. Thus, in the saying that "The perfect man of the world should be he who never sticks fast in indecision, nor ever falls into overhaste," the force

of it lies in what goes before and what follows after. The whole collection, winding up with the chapter of Counsels and Maxims, is in the main an unsystematic enforcement of those peculiar views of human happiness and its narrow limits which proved to be the most important part of Schopenhauer's system. "The sovereign rule in the wisdom of life," he said, "I see in Aristotle's proposition (*Eth. Nic.* vii. 12), ὁ φρόνιμος τὸ ἄλυπον διώκει, οὐ τὸ ἥδυ: Not pleasure but freedom from pain is what the sensible man goes after." The second volume, of Detached though systematically Ordered Thoughts on Various Circumstances, is miscellaneous in its range of topics, and is full of suggestion; but the thoughts are mainly philosophical and literary, and do not come very close to practical wisdom. In truth, so negative a view of happiness, such pale hopes and middling expectations, could not guide a man far on the path of active prudence, where we naturally take for granted that the goal is really something substantial, serious, solid, and positive.[1]

[1] Burke says on the point raised above: "I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those

Nobody cared less than Schopenhauer for the wisdom that is drawn from books, or has said such hard things of mere reading. In the short piece to which I have already referred (p. 80), he works out the difference between the Scholar who has read in books, and the Thinkers, the Geniuses, the Lights of the World, and Furtherers of the human race, who have read directly from the world's own pages. Reading, he says, is only a *succedaneum* for one's own thinking. Reading is thinking with a strange head instead of one's own. People who get their wisdom out of books are like those who have got their knowledge of a country from the descriptions of travellers. Truth that has been picked up from books only sticks to us like an artificial limb, or a false tooth, or a rhinoplastic nose; the truth we have

which enter on the part of pleasure. Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest. Nay, I am in great doubt whether any man could be found, who would earn a life of the most perfect satisfaction at the price of ending it in the torments which justice inflicted in a few hours on the late unfortunate regicide in France" (*Sublime and Beautiful*, pt. I. sec. vii.). The reference is, of course, to Damien.

acquired by our own thinking is like the natural member. At least, as Goethe puts it in his verse,

> **Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,**
> **Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.**

What from thy fathers thou dost inherit, be sure thou earn it, that so it may become thine own.

It is only Goethe and Schiller, and especially Goethe, "the strong, much-toiling sage, with spirit free from mists, and sane and clear," who combine the higher and the lower wisdom, and have skill to put moral truths into forms of words that fix themselves with stings in the reader's mind. All Goethe's work, whether poetry or prose, his plays, his novels, his letters, his conversations, are richly bestrewn with the luminous sentences of a keen-eyed, steadfast, patient, indefatigable watcher of human life. He deals gravely and sincerely with men. He has none of that shallow irony by which small men who have got wrong with the world seek a shabby revenge. He tells us the whole truth. He is not of those second-rate sages who keep their own secrets, externally complying with all the conventions of speech and demeanour, while privately nourishing unbridled freedom of opinion in the inner sanctuary of the mind. He handles

soberly, faithfully, laboriously, cheerfully, every motive and all conduct. He marks himself the friend, the well-wisher, and the helper. I will not begin to quote from Goethe, for I should never end. The volume of *Sprüche*, or aphorisms in rhyme and prose in his collected works, is accessible to everybody, but some of his wisest and finest are to be found in the plays, like the well-known one in his *Tasso*, "In stillness Talent forms itself, but Character in the great current of the world."

But here is a concentrated admonition from the volume that I have named, that will do as well as any other for an example of his temper—

"Wouldst fashion for thyself a seemly life?—
Then fret not over what is past and gone;
And spite of all thou mayst have lost behind,
Yet act as if thy life were just begun.
What each day wills, enough for thee to know;
What each day wills, the day itself will tell.
Do thine own task, and be therewith content;
What others do, that shalt thou fairly judge;
Be sure that thou no brother-mortal hate,
Then all besides leave to the Master Power."

If any of you should be bitten with an unhappy passion for the composition of aphorisms, let me warn such an one that the power of observing

life is rare, the power of drawing new lessons from it is rarer still, and the power of condensing the lesson in a pointed sentence is rarest of all. Beware of cultivating this delicate art. The effort is only too likely to add one more to that perverse class described by Gibbon, who strangle a thought in the hope of strengthening it, and applaud their own skill when they have shown in a few absurd words the fourth part of an idea. Let me warmly urge anybody with so mistaken an ambition, instead of painfully distilling poor platitudes of his own, to translate the shrewd saws of the wise browed Goethe.

Some have found light in the sayings of Balthasar Gracian, a Spaniard, who flourished at the end of the seventeenth century, whose maxims were translated into English at the very beginning of the eighteenth, and who was introduced to the modern public in an excellent article by Sir M. E. Grant Duff a few years ago. The English title is attractive,—*The Art of Prudence, or a Companion for a Man of Sense.* I do not myself find Gracian much of a companion, though some of his aphorisms give a neat turn to a commonplace. Thus:—

"The pillow is a dumb sibyl. To sleep upon a thing that is to be done, is better than to be wakened up by one already done."

"To equal a predecessor one must have twice his worth."

"What is easy ought to be entered upon as though it were difficult, and what is difficult as though it were easy."

"Those things are generally best remembered which ought most to be forgot. Not seldom the surest remedy of the evil consists in forgetting it."

It is France that excels in the form no less than in the matter of aphorism, and for the good reason that in France the arts of polished society were relatively at an early date the objects of a serious and deliberate cultivation, such as was and perhaps remains unknown in the rest of Europe. Conversation became a fine art. "I hate war," said one; "it spoils conversation." The leisured classes found their keenest relish in delicate irony, in piquancy, in contained vivacity, in the study of niceties of observation and finish of phrase. You have a picture of it in such a play as Molière's *Misanthropist*, where we see a section of the polished life of the time—men and women making and receiving compliments, discoursing on affairs with easy lightness, flitting

backwards and forwards with a thousand petty hurries, and among them one singular figure, hoarse, rough, sombre, moving with a chilling reality in the midst of frolicking shadows. But the shadows were all in all to one another. Not a point of conduct, not a subtlety of social motive, escaped detection and remark.

Dugald Stewart has pointed to the richness of the French tongue in appropriate and discriminating expressions for varieties of intellectual turn and shade. How many of us, who claim to a reasonable knowledge of French, will undertake easily to find English equivalents for such distinctions as are expressed in the following phrases—Esprit juste, esprit étendu, esprit fin, esprit délié, esprit de lumière. These numerous distinctions are the evidence, as Stewart says, of the attention paid by the cultivated classes to delicate shades of mind and feeling. Compare with them the colloquial use of our terribly overworked word "clever." Society and conversation have never been among us the school of reflection, the spring of literary inspiration, that they have been in France. The English rule has rather been like that of the ancient Persians, that the

great thing is to learn to ride, to shoot with the bow, and to speak the truth. There is much in it. But it has been more favourable to strength than to either subtlety or finish.

One of the most commonly known of all books of maxims, after the Proverbs of Solomon, are the Moral Reflections of La Rochefoucauld. The author lived at court, himself practised all the virtues which he seemed to disparage, and took so much trouble to make sure of the right expression that many of these short sentences were more than thirty times revised. They were given to the world in the last half of the seventeenth century in a little volume which Frenchmen used to know by heart, which gave a new turn to the literary taste of the nation, and which has been translated into every civilised tongue. It paints men as they would be if self-love were the one great mainspring of human action, and it makes magnanimity itself no better than self-interest in disguise.

"Interest," he says, "speaks all sorts of tongues and plays all sorts of parts, even the part of the disinterested."

"Gratitude is with most people only a strong desire for greater benefits to come."

"Love of justice is with most of us nothing but the fear of suffering injustice."

"Friendship is only a reciprocal conciliation of interests, a mutual exchange of good offices; it is a species of commerce out of which self-love always intends to make something."

"We have all strength enough to endure the troubles of other people."

"Our repentance is not so much regret for the ill we have done, as fear of the ill that may come to us in consequence."

And everybody here knows the saying that "In the adversity of our best friends we often find something that is not exactly displeasing."

We cannot wonder that in spite of their piquancy of form, such sentences as these have aroused in many minds an invincible repugnance for what would be so tremendous a calumny on human nature, if the book were meant to be a picture of human nature as a whole. "I count Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*," says one critic, "a bad book. As I am reading it, I feel discomfort; I have a sense of suffering which I cannot define. Such thoughts tarnish the brightness of the soul; they degrade the heart." Yet as a faithful presentation of human selfishness, and of you and me in so far as we happen to be mainly selfish,

the odious mirror has its uses by showing us what manner of man we are or may become. Let us not forget either that not quite all is selfishness in La Rochefoucauld. Everybody knows his saying that hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue. There is a subtle truth in this, too,—that to be in too great a hurry to discharge an obligation is itself a kind of ingratitude. Nor is there any harm in the reflection that no fool is so troublesome as the clever fool; nor in this, that only great men have any business with great defects; nor, finally, in the consolatory saying, that we are never either so happy or so unhappy as we imagine.

No more important name is associated with the literature of aphorism than that of Pascal; but the Thoughts of Pascal concern the deeper things of speculative philosophy and religion, rather than the wisdom of daily life, and, besides, though aphoristic in form, they are in substance systematic. "I blame equally," he said, "those who take sides for praising man, those who are for blaming him, and those who amuse themselves with him: the only wise part is search for truth

—search with many sighs." On man, as he exists in society, he said little; and what he said does not make us hopeful. He saw the darker side. "If everybody knew what one says of the other, there would not be four friends left in the world." "Would you have men think well of you, then do not speak well of yourself." And so forth. If you wish to know Pascal's theory you may find it set out in brilliant verse in the opening lines of the second book of Pope's *Essay on Man*. "What a chimera is Man!" said Pascal. "What a confused chaos! What a subject of contradiction! A professed judge of all things, and yet a feeble worm of the earth; the great depository and guardian of truth, and yet a mere huddle of uncertainty; the glory and the scandal of the universe." Shakespeare was wiser and deeper when, under this quintessence of dust, he discerned what a piece of work is man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable. That serene and radiant faith is the secret, added to matchless gifts of imagination and music, why Shakespeare is the greatest of men.

There is a smart, spurious wisdom of the world

which has the bitterness not of the salutary tonic but of mortal poison; and of this kind the master is Chamfort, who died during the French Revolution (and for that matter died of it), and whose little volume of thoughts is often extremely witty, always pointed, but not seldom cynical and false. "If you live among men," he said, "the heart must either break or turn to brass." "The public, the public," he cried; "how many fools does it take to make a public!" "What is celebrity? The advantage of being known to people who don't know you."

All literatures might be ransacked in vain for a more repulsive saying than this, that "A man must swallow a toad every morning if he wishes to be quite sure of finding nothing still more disgusting before the day is over." We cannot be surprised to hear of the lady who said that a conversation with Chamfort in the morning made her melancholy until bedtime. Yet Chamfort is the author of the not unwholesome saying that "The most wasted of all days is that on which one has not laughed." One of his maxims lets us into the secret of his misanthropy. "Whoever," he said, "is not a misanthropist

at forty can never have loved mankind." It is easy to know what this means. Of course if a man is so superfine that he will not love mankind any longer than he can believe them to be demigods and angels, it is true that at forty he may have discovered that they are neither. Beginning by looking for men to be more perfect than they can be, he ends by thinking them worse than they are, and then he secretly plumes himself on his superior cleverness in having found humanity out. For the deadliest of all wet blankets give me a middle-aged man who has been most of a visionary in his youth.

To correct all this, let us recall Helvétius's saying that I have already quoted, which made so deep an impression on Jeremy Bentham: "In order to love mankind, we must not expect too much from them." And let us remember that Fénelon, one of the most saintly men that ever lived, and whose very countenance bore such a mark of goodness that when he was in a room men found they could not desist from looking at him, wrote to a friend the year before he died, "I ask little from most men; I try to render them much, and to expect nothing

in return, and I get very well out of the bargain."

Chamfort I will leave, with his sensible distinction between Pride and Vanity. "A man," he says, "has advanced far in the study of morals who has mastered the difference between pride and vanity. The first is lofty, calm, immovable; the second is uncertain, capricious, unquiet. The one adds to a man's stature; the other only puffs him out. The one is the source of a thousand virtues; the other is that of nearly all vices and all perversities. There is a kind of pride in which are included all the commandments of God; and a kind of vanity which contains the seven mortal sins."

I will say little of La Bruyère, by far the greatest, broadest, strongest, of French character-writers, because his is not one of the houses of which you can judge by a brick or two taken at random. For those in whom the excitements of modern literature have not burnt up the faculty of sober meditation on social man, La Bruyère must always be one of the foremost names. Macaulay somewhere calls him thin. But Macaulay has less ethical depth, and less

perception of ethical depth, than any writer that ever lived with equally brilliant gifts in other ways; and *thin* is the very last word that describes this admirable master. If one seeks to measure how far removed the great classic moralists are from thinness, let him turn from La Bruyère to the inane subtleties and meaningless conundrums, not worth answering, that do duty for analysis of character in some modern American literature. We feel that La Bruyère, though retiring, studious, meditative, and self-contained, has complied with the essential condition of looking at life and men themselves, and with his own eyes. His aphoristic sayings are the least important part of him, but here are one or two examples :—

"Eminent posts make great men greater, and little men less."

"There is in some men a certain mediocrity of mind that helps to make them wise."

"The flatterer has not a sufficiently good opinion either of himself or of others."

"People from the provinces and fools are always ready to take offence, and to suppose that you are laughing at them : we should never risk a pleasantry, except with well-bred people, and people with brains."

"All confidence is dangerous, unless it is complete

there are few circumstances in which it is not best either to hide all or to tell all."

"When the people is in a state of agitation, we do not see how quiet is to return; and when it is tranquil, we do not see how the quiet is to be disturbed."

"Men count for almost nothing the virtues of the heart, and idolise gifts of body or intellect. The man who quite coolly, and with no idea that he is offending modesty, says that he is kind-hearted, constant, faithful, sincere, fair, grateful, would not dare to say that he is quick and clever, that he has fine teeth and a delicate skin."

I will say nothing of Rivarol, a caustic wit of the revolutionary time, nor of Joubert, a writer of sayings of this century, of whom Mr. Matthew Arnold has said all that needs saying. He is delicate, refined, acute, but his thoughts were fostered in the hothouse of a coterie, and have none of the salt and sapid flavour that comes to more masculine spirits from active contact with the world.

I should prefer to close this survey in the sunnier moral climate of Vauvenargues. His own life was a pathetic failure in all the aims of outer circumstance. The chances of fortune and of health persistently baulked him, but from each stroke he rose up again, with undimmed

serenity and undaunted spirit. As blow fell upon blow, the sufferer held firmly to his incessant lesson,—Be brave, persevere in the fight, struggle on, do not let go, think magnanimously of man and life, for man is good and life is affluent and fruitful. He died a hundred and forty years ago, leaving a little body of maxims behind him which, for tenderness, equanimity, cheerfulness, grace, sobriety, and hope, are not surpassed in prose literature. "One of the noblest qualities in our nature," he said, "is that we are able so easily to dispense with greater perfection."

"Magnanimity owes no account to prudence of its motives."

"To do great things a man must live as though he had never to die."

"The first days of spring have less grace than the growing virtue of a young man."

"You must rouse in men a consciousness of their own prudence and strength if you would raise their character."

Just as Tocqueville said: "He who despises mankind will never get the best out of either others or himself."[1]

[1] The reader who cares to know more about Vauvenargues will find a chapter on him in the present writer's *Miscellanies*, vol. ii.

The best known of Vauvenargues' sayings, as it is the deepest and the broadest, is the far-reaching sentence already quoted, that "Great thoughts come from the heart." And this is the truth that shines out as we watch the voyagings of humanity from the "wide, grey, lampless depths" of time. Those have been greatest in thought who have been best endowed with faith, hope, sympathy, and the spirit of effort. And next to them come the great stern, mournful men, like Tacitus, Dante, Pascal, who, standing as far aloof from the soft poetic dejection of some of the moods of Shelley or Keats as from the savage fury of Swift, watch with a prophet's indignation the heedless waste of faculty and opportunity, the triumph of paltry motive and paltry aim, as if we were the flies of a summer noon, which do more than any active malignity to distort the noble lines, and to weaken or to frustrate the strong and healthy parts, of human nature. For practical purposes all these complaints of man are of as little avail as Johnson found the complaint that of the globe so large a space should be occupied by the uninhabitable ocean, encumbered by naked mountains, lost

under barren sands, scorched by perpetual heat or petrified by perpetual frost, and so small a space be left for the production of fruits, the pasture of cattle, and the accommodation of men.

When we have deducted, said Johnson, all the time that is absorbed in sleep, or appropriated to the other demands of nature, or the inevitable requirements of social intercourse, all that is torn from us by violence of disease, or imperceptibly stolen from us by languor, we may realise of how small a portion of our time we are truly masters. And the same consideration of the ceaseless and natural pre-occupations of men in the daily struggle will reconcile the wise man to all the disappointments, delays, shortcomings of the world, without shaking the firmness of his own faith, or the intrepidity of his own purpose.

MAINE ON POPULAR GOVERNMENT.[1]

"If the government of the Many," says the distinguished author of the volume before us, "be really inevitable, one would have thought that the possibility of discovering some other and newer means of enabling it to fulfil the ends for which all governments exist would have been a question exercising all the highest powers of the strongest minds, particularly in the community which, through the success of its popular institutions, has paved the way for modern Democracy. Yet hardly anything worth mentioning has been produced on the subject in England or on the Continent." To say this, by the way, is strangely to ignore three or four very remarkable books that have been published within the last twenty or five-and-twenty years, that have excited immense attention and discussion, and

[1] February 1886.

that are the work of minds that even Sir Henry Maine would hardly call weak or inactive. We are no adherents of any of Mr. Hare's proposals, but there are important public men who think that his work on the *Election of Representatives* is as conspicuous a landmark in politics as the *Principia* was in natural philosophy. J. S. Mill's volume on *Representative Government*, which appeared in 1861, was even a more memorable contribution towards the solution of the very problem defined by Sir Henry Maine, than was the older Mill's article on Government in 1820 to the political difficulties of the eve of the Reform Bill. Again, Lord Grey's work on Parliamentary Government failed in making its expected mark on legislation, but it was worth mentioning because it goes on the lines of the very electoral law in Belgium which Sir Henry Maine (p. 109) describes as deserving our most respectful attention — an attention, I suspect, which it is as little likely to receive from either of our two political parties as Lord Grey's suggestions. Nor should we neglect Sir G. C. Lewis's little book, or Mr. Harrison's volume on *Order and Progress*, which abounds in im-

portant criticism and suggestion for the student of the abstract politics of modern societies. In the United States, too, and in our own colonies, there have been attempts, not without merit, to state and to deal with some of the drawbacks of popular government.

Nothing has been done, however, that makes the appearance in the field of a mind of so high an order as Sir Henry Maine's either superfluous or unwelcome. It is hardly possible that he should discuss any subject within the publicist's range, without bringing into light some of its less superficial aspects, and adding observations of originality and value to the stock of political thought. To set people thinking at all on the more general and abstract truths of that great subject which is commonly left to be handled lightly, unsystematically, fragmentarily, in obedience to the transitory necessities of the day, by Ministers, members of Parliament, journalists, electors, and the whole host who live intellectually and politically from hand to mouth, is in itself a service of all but the first order. Service of the very first order is not merely to propound objections, but to devise working answers, and

this is exactly what Sir Henry Maine abstains from doing.

No one will think the moment for a serious political inquiry ill chosen. We have just effected an immense recasting of our system of parliamentary representation. The whole consequences of the two great Acts of 1884 and 1885 are assuredly not to be finally gauged by anything that has happened during the recent election. Yet even this single election has brought about a crisis of vast importance in one part of the United Kingdom, by forcing the question of an Irish constitution to the front. It is pretty clear, also, that the infusion of a large popular element into the elective House has made more difficult the maintenance of its old relations with the hereditary House. Even if there were no others, these two questions alone, and especially the first of them, will make the severest demands on the best minds in the country. We shall be very fortunate if the crisis produces statesmen as sagacious as those American publicists of whom Sir Henry Maine rightly entertains so exalted an opinion.

Whether or not we are on the threshold of

great legislative changes, it is in any case certain that the work of government will be carried on under new parliamentary and social conditions. In meeting this prospect, we have the aid neither of strong and systematic political schools, nor powerful and coherent political parties. No one can pretend, for instance, that there is any body of theoretic opinion so compact and so well thought out as Benthamism was in its own day and generation. Again, in practice, there are ominous signs that Parliament is likely to break up into groups; and the substitution of groups for parties is certain, if continental experience is to count for anything, to create new obstacles in the way of firm and stable government. Weak government throws power to something which usurps the name of public opinion, and public opinion as expressed by the ventriloquists of the newspapers is at once more capricious and more vociferous than it ever was. This was abundantly shown during the last five years by a variety of unfortunate public adventures. Then, does the excitement of democracy weaken the stability of national temperament? By setting

up what in physics would be called a highly increased molecular activity, does it disturb not merely conservative respect for institutions, but respect for coherence and continuity of opinion and sentiment in the character of the individual himself? Is there a fluidity of character in modern democratic societies which contrasts not altogether favourably with the strong solid types of old? Are Englishmen becoming less like Romans, and more like disputatious Greeks? These and many other considerations of the same kind are enough to secure a ready welcome for any thinker who can light up the obscurities of the time.

With profound respect for Sir Henry Maine's attainments, and every desire to profit by illumination wherever it may be discerned, we cannot clearly see how the present volume either makes the problems more intelligible, or points the way to feasible solutions. Though he tries, in perfect good faith, to be the dispassionate student, he often comes very close to the polemics of the hour. The truth is that scientific lawyers have seldom been very favourable to popular government, and when the scientific lawyer is doubled

with the Indian bureaucrat, we are pretty sure beforehand that in such a tribunal it will go hard with democracy. That the author extremely dislikes and suspects the new order, he does not hide either from himself or us. Intellectual contempt for the idolatries of the forum and the market-place has infected him with a touch of that chagrin which came to men like Tacitus from disbelief in the moral government of a degenerate world. Though he strives, like Tacitus, to take up his parable *nec amore et sine odio,* the disgust is ill concealed. There are passages where we almost hear the drone of a dowager in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. It was said of Tocqueville that he was an aristocrat who accepted his defeat. Sir Henry Maine in politics is a bureaucrat who cannot bear to think that democracy will win. He is dangerously near the frame of mind of Scipio Emilianus, after the movement of the Gracchi and the opening of the Roman revolution. Scipio came to the conclusion that with whichever party he took sides, or whatever measures a disinterested and capable statesman might devise, he would only aggravate the evil.

Sir Henry Maine would seem to be nearly as despondent. Hence his book is fuller of apprehension than of guidance, more plausible in alarm than wise or useful in direction. It is exclusively critical and negative. There is, indeed, an admirable account of the constitution of the United States. But on the one great question on which the constitution of the United States might have been expected to shed light—the modification of the House of Lords—Sir Henry Maine explicitly admits (p. 186) that it is very difficult to obtain from the younger institution, the Senate, any lessons which can be of use in the reconstruction of the older. At every turn, the end of the discussion lands us in a philosophical *cul-de-sac*, and nothing is so depressing as a *cul-de-sac*. The tone is that of the political valetudinarian, watching with uneasy eye the ways of rude health. Unreflecting optimism about Popular Government is sickening, but calculated pessimism is not much better.

Something, no doubt, may often be gained by the mere cross-examination of catchwords and the exposure of platitudes. Popular govern-

ment is no more free from catchwords and platitudes than any other political, religious, or social cause which interests a great many people, and is the subject of much discussion. Even the Historical Method has its own claptrap. But one must not make too much of these things. "In order to love mankind," said Helvétius, "one must not expect too much from them." And fairly to appreciate institutions you must not hold them up against the light that blazes in Utopia; you must not expect them to satisfy microscopic analysis, nor judge their working, which is inevitably rough, awkward, clumsy, and second-best, by the fastidious standards of closet logic.

Before saying more as to the substance of the book, we may be allowed to notice one or two matters of literary or historical interest in which Sir Henry Maine is certainly open to criticism. There is an old question about Burke which was discussed by the present writer a long time ago. A great disillusion, says Sir Henry Maine, has always seemed to him to separate the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* and the *Speech on Taxation* from the

magnificent panegyric on the British Constitution in 1790. "Not many persons in the last century could have divined from the previous opinions of Edmund Burke the real substructure of his political creed, or did in fact suspect it till it was uncovered by the early and comparatively slight miscarriage of French revolutionary institutions." This is, as a statement of fact, not at all correct. Lord Chatham detected what he believed to be the mischievous Conservatism in Burke's constitutional doctrines at the very outset. So did the Constitutional Society detect it. So did Mrs. Macaulay, Bishop Watson, and many other people. The story of Burke's inconsistency is, of course, as old as Sheridan. Hazlitt declared that the Burke of 1770 and the Burke of 1790 were not merely opposite persons, but deadly enemies. Mr. Buckle, who is full of veneration for the early writings, but who dislikes the later ones, gets over the difficulty by insisting that Burke actually went out of his mind after 1789. We should have expected a subtler judgment from Sir Henry Maine. Burke belonged from first to last to the great historic and positive school, of which

the founder was Montesquieu. Its whole method, principle, and sentiment, all animated him with equal force whether he was defending the secular pomps of Oude or the sanctity of Benares, the absolutism of Versailles, or the free and ancient Parliament at Westminster.[1]

Versailles reminds us of a singular overstatement by Sir Henry Maine of the blindness of the privileged classes in France to the approach of the Revolution. He speaks as if Lord Chesterfield's famous passage were the only anticipation of the coming danger. There is at least one utterance of Louis XV. himself, which shows that he did not expect things to last much beyond his time. D'Argenson, in the very year of Chesterfield's prophecy, pronounced that a revolution was inevitable, and he even went so close to the mark as to hint that it would arise on the first occasion when it should be necessary to convoke the States General. Rousseau, in a page of the *Confessions*, not only divined a speedy revolution, but enumerated the operative causes of it with

[1] It is satisfactory to have the authority of Mr. Lecky on the same side. *England in the Eighteenth Century*, vol. iii. chap. ix. p. 209.

real precision. There is a striking prediction in Voltaire, and another in Mercier de la Rivière. Other names might be quoted to the same effect, including Maria Theresa, who described the ruined condition of the French monarchy, and only hoped that the ruin might not overtake her daughter. The mischief was not so much that the privileged classes were blind as that they were selfish, stubborn, helpless, and reckless. The point is not very important in itself, but it is characteristic of a very questionable way of reading human history. Sir Henry Maine's readiness to treat revolutions as due to erroneous abstract ideas naturally inclines him to take too narrow a view both of the preparation in circumstances, and of the preparation in the minds of observant onlookers.

In passing, by the way, we are curious to know the writer's authority for what he calls the odd circumstance that the Jacobins generally borrowed their phrases from the legendary history of the early Roman Republic, while the Girondins preferred to take metaphors from the literature of Rousseau (p. 75). There was plenty of nonsense talked about Brutus and Scævola by

both parties, and it is not possible to draw the line with precision. But the received view is that the Girondins were Voltairean, and the Jacobins Rousseauite, while Danton was of the school of the Encyclopædia, and Hébert and Chaumette were inspired by Holbach.

The author seems to us greatly to exaggerate the whole position of Rousseau, and even in a certain sense to mistake the nature of his influence. That Jean-Jacques was a far-reaching and important voice the present writer is not at all likely to deny; but no estimate of his influence in the world is correct which does not treat him rather as moralist than publicist. *Emilius* went deeper into men's minds in France and in Europe at large, and did more to quicken the democratic spirit, than the *Social Contract.* Apart from this, Sir Henry Maine places Rousseau on an isolated eminence which does not really belong to him. It did not fall within the limited scope of such an essay as Sir Henry Maine's to trace the leading ideas of the *Social Contract* to the various sources from which they had come, but his account of these sources is, even for its scale, inadequate. Portions of

Rousseau's ideas, he says truly, may be discovered in the speculations of older writers; and he mentions Hobbes and the French Economists. But the most characteristic of all the elements in Rousseau's speculation were drawn from Locke. The theoretic basis of popular government is to be found in more or less definite shape in various authors from Thomas Aquinas downwards. But it was Locke's philosophic vindication of the Revolution of 1688, in the famous essay on Civil Government, that directly taught Rousseau the lesson of the Sovereignty of the People. Such originality as the *Social Contract* possesses is due to its remarkable union of the influence of the two antagonistic English Thinkers. The differences between Hobbes and Rousseau were striking enough. Rousseau looked on men as good, Hobbes looked on them as bad. The one described the state of nature as a state of peace, the other as a state of war. The first believed that laws and institutions had depraved man, the second that they had improved him. In spite of these differences the influence of Hobbes was important, but only important in combination. "The total result is,"

as I have said elsewhere, "a curious fusion between the premises and the temper of Hobbes, and the conclusions of Locke. This fusion produced that popular absolutism of which the *Social Contract* was the theoretical expression, and Jacobin supremacy the practical manifestation. Rousseau borrowed from Hobbes the true conception of sovereignty, and from Locke the true conception of the ultimate seat and original of authority, and of the two together he made the great image of the Sovereign People. Strike the crowned head from that monstrous figure which is the frontispiece of the *Leviathan*, and you have a frontispiece that will do excellently well for the *Social Contract*."[1]

One more word may be said by the way. The very slightest account of Rousseau is too slight to be tolerable, if it omits to mention Calvin. Rousseau's whole theory of the Legislator, which produced such striking results in certain transitory phases of the French Revolution, grew up in his mind from the constitution which the great reformer had so predominant a share in framing for the little republic where Rousseau was born.

[1] *Rousseau*, chap. xii.

This omission of Locke and Calvin again exemplifies the author's characteristic tendency to look upon political ideas as if speculative writers got them out of their own heads, or out of the heads of other people, apart from the suggestions of events and the requirements of circumstance. Calvin was the builder of a working government, and Locke was the defender of a practical revolution.

Nor does the error stop at the literary sources of political theories. A point more or less in an estimate of a writer or a book is of trivial importance compared with what strikes us as Sir Henry Maine's tendency to impute an unreal influence to writers and books altogether. There is, no doubt, a vulgar and superficial opinion that mere speculation is so remote from the real interests of men, that it is a waste of time for practical people to concern themselves about speculation. No view could be more foolish, save one; and that one is the opposite view, that the real interests of men have no influence on their speculative opinions, and no share either in moulding those opinions or in causing their adoption. Sir Henry Maine does not push things quite so far as this. Still he appears to

as to attribute almost exclusive influence to political theories, and almost entirely to omit what we take to be the much more important reaction upon theory, both of human nature, and of the experience of human life and outward affairs. He makes no allowance among innovating agencies for native rationalism without a formula. His brilliant success in other applications of the Historic Method has disposed him to see survivals where other observers will be content with simpler explanations. The reader is sometimes tempted to recall Edie Ochiltree's rude interruption of Mr. Oldbuck's enthusiasm over the prætorium of the immortal Roman camp at Monkbarns. "Prætorian here, Prætorian there! I mind the bigging o 't."

Sir Henry Maine believes that the air is thick with ideas about democracy that were conceived *a priori*, and that sprung from the teaching of Rousseau. A conviction of the advantages of legislative change, for example, he considers to owe its origin much less to active and original intelligence, than to "the remote effect of words and notions derived from broken-down political theories" (p. 171). There are two great

fountains of political theory in our country according to the author: Rousseau is one, and Bentham is the other. Current thought and speech is infested by the floating fragments of these two systems—by loose phrases, by vague notions, by superstitions, that enervate the human intellect and endanger social safety. This is the constant refrain of the pages before us. We should have liked better evidence. We do not believe that it is a Roman prætorium. Men often pick up old phrases for new events, even when they are judging events afresh with independent minds. When a politician of the day speaks of natural rights, he uses a loose traditional expression for a view of social equities which has come to him, not from a book, but from a survey of certain existing social facts. Now the phrase, the literary description, is the least significant part of the matter. When Mr. Mill talks of the influence of Bentham's writings, he is careful to tell us that he does not mean that they caused the Reform Bill or the Appropriation Clause. "The changes which have been made," says Mill, "and the greater changes which will be made, in our institutions

are not the work of philosophers, but of the interests and instincts of large portions of society recently grown into strength" (*Dissertations,* i. 332). That is the point. It is the action of these interests and instincts which Sir Henry Maine habitually overlooks. Nor is the omission a mere speculative imperfection. It has an important bearing on the whole practical drift of the book. If he had made more room for "the common intellect rough-hewing political truths at the suggestion of common wants and common experience," he would have viewed existing circumstances with a less lively apprehension.

It is easy to find an apposite illustration of what is meant by saying that this talk of the influence of speculation is enormously exaggerated and misleading. When Arthur Young was in France in the autumn of 1787, he noticed a remarkable revolution in manners in two or three important respects. One of them was a new fashion that had just come in, of spending some weeks in the country: everybody who had a country seat went to live there, and such as had none went to visit those who had. This

new custom, observed the admirable Young, is one of the best that they have taken from England, and "its introduction was effected the easier being assisted by the magic of Rousseau's writings." The other and more generally known change was that women of the first fashion were no longer ashamed of nursing their own children, and that infants were no longer tightly bound round by barbarous stays and swaddling clothes. This wholesome change, too, was assisted by Rousseau's eloquent pleas for simplicity and the life natural. Of these particular results of his teaching in France a hundred years ago the evidence is ample, direct, and beyond denial. But whenever we find gentlemen with a taste for country life, and ladies with a fancy for nursing their own children, we surely need not cry out that here is another proof of the extraordinary influence of the speculations of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. We need not treat it as a survival of a broken-down theory. "Great Nature is more wise than I," says the Poet. Great Nature had much more to do with moulding men and women to these things than all the books that have ever been printed.

We are entirely sceptical as to the proposition that "men have at all times quarrelled more fiercely about phrases and formulas than even about material interests" (p. 124). There has been a certain amount of fighting in the world about mere words, as idle as the faction fights between Caravats and Shanavests, or Two-Year-Olds and Three-Year-Olds in Ireland. But the more carefully we look into human history, the more apparent it becomes that underneath the phrase or the formula there is usually a material or a quasi-material, or a political, or a national, or an ecclesiastical interest. Few quarrels now seem so purely verbal as those which for several centuries raged about the mysteries of the faith in the Western and the Eastern Churches. Yet these quarrels, apparently as frivolous as they were ferocious, about the relations of mind and matter, about the composition of the Trinity, about the Divine nature, turned much less on futile metaphysics than on the solid competition for ecclesiastical power, or the conflict of rival nationalities. The most transcendental heresy or orthodoxy generally had business at the bottom of it.

In limiting the parentage of Modern English Liberalism of a Radical or democratic type to Rousseau and Bentham, the author has left out of sight what is assuredly a much more important factor than any speculative, literary, or philosophic matter whatever. "Englishmen," he says truly, "are wont to be content with the rough rule of success or failure as the test of right or wrong in national undertakings." The same habit of mind and temper marks the attitude of Englishmen towards their national institutions. They look to success and failure, they take the measure of things from results, they consult the practical working of the machine, they will only go to school with experience. We cannot find the proof that *a priori* Radicalism ever at any time got a real hold of any considerable mass of the people of this country, or that any of the great innovations in domestic policy since the end of Lord Liverpool's administration have been inspired or guided by Rousseauite assumptions. Godwin, whose book on Political Justice was for a long time the great literary fountain of English Radicalism, owed quite as much to the utilitarian Helvétius as to the sentimental Rousseau. Nor

can either William Cobbett or Joseph Hume be said to have dealt largely in *a priori*. What makes the Radical of the street is mostly mother-wit exercising itself upon the facts of the time. His weakness is that he does not know enough of the facts of other times.

Sir Henry Maine himself points to what has had a far more decisive influence on English ways of thinking about politics than his two philosophers, put together. "The American Republic," he says (p. 11), "has greatly influenced the favour into which popular government grew. It disproved the once universal assumptions that no Republic could govern a large territory, and that no strictly Republican government could be stable." Nothing can be more true. When Burke and Chatham and Fox persistently declared that the victory of England over the colonists would prove fatal in the long run to the liberties of England itself, those great men were even wiser than they knew. The success of popular government across the Atlantic has been the strongest incentive to the extension of popular government here. We need go no further back than the

Reform Bill of 1867 to remind ourselves that the victory of the North over the South, and the extraordinary clemency and good sense with which that victory was used, had more to do with the concession of the franchise to householders in boroughs than all the eloquence of Mr. Gladstone and all the diplomacies of Mr. Disraeli.

To the influence of the American Union must be added that of the British colonies. The success of popular self-government in these thriving communities is reacting on political opinion at home with a force that no statesman neglects, and that is every day increasing. There is even a danger that the influence may go too far. They are solving some of our problems, but not under our conditions, and not in presence of the same difficulties. Still the effect of colonial prosperity—a prosperity alike of admirable achievement and boundless promise—is irresistible. It imparts a freedom, an elasticity, an expansiveness, to English political notions, and gives our people a confidence in free institutions and popular government, which they would never have drawn from the most

eloquent assumptions of speculative system-mongers, nor from any other source whatever, save practical experience carefully observed and rationally interpreted. This native and independent rationality in men is what the jealous votary of the historic method places far too low.

In coming closer to the main current of the book, our first disappointment is that Sir Henry Maine has not been very careful to do full justice to the views that he criticises. He is not altogether above lending himself to the hearsay of the partisan. He allows expressions to slip from him which show that he has not been anxious to face the problems of popular government as popular government is understood by those who have best right to speak for it. "The more the difficulties of multitudinous government are probed," he says (p. 180), "the stronger grows the doubt of the infallibility of popularly elected legislatures." We do not profess to answer for all that may have been said by Mr. Bancroft, or Walt Whitman, or all the orators of all the Fourths of July since American Inde-

pendence. But we are not acquainted with any English writer or politician of the very slightest consideration or responsibility who has committed himself to the astounding proposition, that popularly elected legislatures are infallible. Who has ever advanced such a doctrine? Further, "It requires some attention to facts to see how widely spread is the misgiving as to the absolute wisdom of popularly elected chambers." We are not surprised at the misgiving. But after reasonable attention to facts, we cannot recall any publicist, whom it could be worth while to spend five minutes in refuting, who has ever said that popularly elected chambers are absolutely wise. Again, we should like the evidence for the statement that popularly elected Houses "do not nowadays appeal to the wise deduction from experience, as old as Aristotle, which no student of constitutional history will deny, that the best constitutions are those in which there is a large popular element. It is a singular proof of the widespread influence of the speculations of Rousseau that although very few First Chambers really

represent the entire community, nevertheless in Europe they almost invariably claim to reflect it, and as a consequence they assume an air of divinity, which if it rightfully belonged to them would be fatal to all argument for a Second Chamber." That would be very important if it were true. But is it true that First Chambers assume an air of divinity? Or is such an expression a burlesque of the real argument? A reasonable familiarity with the course of the controversy in France, where the discussion has been abundant, and in England, where it has been comparatively meagre, leaves me, for one, entirely ignorant that this claim for divinity, or anything like it, is ever heard in the debate. The most powerful modern champion of popular government was Gambetta. Did Gambetta consider First Chambers divine? On the contrary, some of the most strenuous pleas for the necessity of a Second Chamber are to be found precisely in the speeches of Gambetta (*e.g.* his speech at Grenoble, in the autumn of 1878, *Discours* viii. 270, etc.). Abstract thinking is thinking withdrawn from the con-

crete and particular facts. But the abstract thinker should not withdraw too far.

Sir Henry Maine speaks (p. 185) of "the saner political theorist, who holds that in secular matters it is better to walk by sight than by faith." He allows that a theorist of this kind, as regards popularly elected chambers, "will be satisfied that experience has shown the best Constitutions to be those in which the popular element is large, and he will readily admit that, as the structure of each society of men slowly alters, it is well to alter and amend the organisation by which this element makes itself felt." Sir Henry Maine would surely have done better service in this grave and difficult discussion, if he had dealt with views which he mistrusts, as they are really held and expressed by sane theorists, and not by insane theorists out of sight. In France, a hundred years ago, from causes that are capable of explanation, the democracy of sentiment swept away the democracy of utility. In spite of casual phrases in public discussion, and in spite of the incendiary trash of Red journalists without influence, it is the democracy of reason, experience, and

utility that is now in the ascendant, both in France and elsewhere.

The same spirit of what we must call parody is shown in such a statement as that (p. 78) "an audience composed of roughs or clowns is boldly told by an educated man that it has more political information than an equal number of scholars." By "roughs" Sir Henry Maine explains that he means the artisans of the towns. The designation is hardly felicitous. It is not even fashionable; for the roughs and clowns are now by common consent of Tories and Liberals alike transformed into capable citizens. Such a phrase gives us a painful glimpse of the accurate knowledge of their countrymen that is possessed by eminent men who write about them from the dim and distant seclusion of college libraries and official bureaux. If Sir Henry Maine could spare a few evenings from dispassionate meditations on popular government in the abstract, to the inspection of the governing people in the concrete, he would be the first to see that to dispatch an audience of skilled artisans as an assembly of roughs is as unscientific, to use the mildest word, as the

habit in a certain religious world of lumping all the unconverted races of the earth in every clime and age in the summary phrase, the heathen. A great meeting of artisans listening to Mr. Arthur Balfour or Sir Henry Roscoe at Manchester, to Sir Lyon Playfair at Leeds (the modern democrat, at any rate, does not think the Republic has no need of chemists), or to anybody else in a great industrial centre anywhere else, is no more an assemblage of roughs than Convocation or the House of Lords. Decidedly, an enemy of the unverified assumptions of democracy ought to be on his guard against the unverified assumptions of pedantocracy.

As for the particular bit of sycophancy which educated men wickedly dangle before roughs and clowns, we should like to be sure that the proposition is correctly reported. If the educated man tells his roughs (if that be the right name for the most skilful, industrious, and effective handicraftsmen in the world) that they have as much of the information necessary for shaping a sound judgment on the political issues submitted to them, as an equal number of average

Masters of Arts and Doctors of Laws, then we should say that the educated man, unless he has been very unlucky with his audience, is perfectly right. He proves that his education has not confined itself to books, bureaux, and an exclusive society, but has been carried on in the bracing air of common life. I will not add anything of my own on this point, because any candidate or member of Parliament is suspect, but I will venture to transcribe a page or so from Mr. Frederic Harrison. Mr. Harrison's intellectual equipment is not inferior to that of Sir Henry Maine himself; and he has long had close and responsible contact with the class of men of whom he is speaking, which cannot be quite a disqualification after all.

"No worse nonsense is talked than what we are told as to the requisites for the elective franchise. To listen to some people, it is almost as solemn a function as to be a trustee of the British Museum. What you want in a body of electors is a rough, shrewd eye for men of character, honesty, and purpose. Very plain men know who wish them well, and the sort of thing which will bring them good. Electors have not got to govern the country; they have only to find a set of men who will see that the Government is just and active. . . . All things go best by comparison, and a body of men may

be as good voters as their neighbours without being the type of the Christian hero.

"So far from being the least fit for political influence of all classes in the community, the best part of the working class forms the most fit of all others. If any section of the people is to be the paramount arbiter in public affairs, the only section competent for this duty is the superior order of workmen. Governing is one thing; but electors of any class cannot or ought not to govern. Electing, or the giving an indirect approval of Government, is another thing, and demands wholly different qualities. These are moral, not intellectual; practical, not special gifts—gifts of a very plain and almost universal order. Such are, firstly, social sympathies and sense of justice; then openness and plainness of character; lastly, habits of action, and a practical knowledge of social misery. These are the qualities which fit men to be the arbiters or ultimate source (though certainly not the instruments) of political power. These qualities the best working men possess in a far higher degree than any other portion of the community; indeed, they are almost the only part of the community which possesses them in any perceptible degree." [1]

The worst of it is that, if Sir Henry Maine is right, we have no more to hope from other classes than from roughs and clowns. He can discern no blue sky in any quarter. "In politics," he says, "the most powerful of all

[1] *Order and Progress*, pp. 149-54, and again at p. 174.

causes is the timidity, the listlessness, and the superficiality of the generality of minds" (p. 73). This is carrying criticism of democracy into an indictment against human nature. What is to become of us, thus placed between the devil of mob ignorance and corruption, and the deep sea of genteel listlessness and superficiality? After all, Sir Henry Maine is only repeating in more sober tones the querulous remonstrances with which we are so familiar on the lips of Ultramontanes and Legitimists. A less timid observer of contemporary events, certainly in the land that all of us know best and love best, would judge that, when it comes to a pinch, Liberals are still passably prudent, and Conservatives quite sufficiently wide-awake.

Another of the passages in Sir Henry Maine's book, that savours rather of the party caricaturist than of the "dispassionate student of politics," is the following:—

"There is some resemblance between the period of political reform in the nineteenth century and the period of religious reformation in the sixteenth. Now as then the multitude of followers must be distinguished from the smaller group of leaders. Now as then there are a certain number of zealots who desire that truth shall

prevail. . . . But behind these, now as then, there is a crowd which has imbibed a delight in change for its own sake, who would reform the Suffrage, or the House of Lords, or the Land Laws, or the Union with Ireland, in precisely the same spirit in which the mob behind the reformers of religion broke the nose of a saint in stone, made a bonfire of copes and surplices, or shouted for the government of the Church by presbyteries" (p. 130).

We should wish to look at this remarkable picture a little more closely. That there exist Anabaptists in the varied hosts of the English reformers is true. The feats of the Social Democrats, however, at the recent election hardly convince us that they have very formidable multitudes behind them. Nor is it they who concern themselves with such innovations as those which Sir Henry Maine specifies. The Social Democrats, even of the least red shade, go a long way beyond and below such trifles as Suffrage or the Upper House. To say of the crowd who do concern themselves with reform of the Suffrage, or the Land Laws, or the House of Lords, or the Union with Ireland, that they are animated by a delight in change for its own sake, apart from the respectable desire to apply a practical remedy to a practical inconvenience, is

to show a rather highflying disregard of easily ascertainable facts. The Crowd listen with interest to talk about altering the Land Laws, because they suspect the English land system to have something to do with the unprosperous condition of the landlord, the farmer, and the labourer; with the depopulation of the country and the congestion in the towns; with the bad housing of the poor, and with various other evils which they suppose themselves to see staring them daily in the face. They may be entirely mistaken alike in their estimate of mischief and their hope of mitigation. But they are not moved by delight in change for its own sake. When the Crowd sympathises with disapproval of the House of Lords, it is because the legislative performances of that body are believed to have impeded useful reforms in the past, to be impeding them now, and to be likely to impede them in the future. This may be a sad misreading of the history of the last fifty years, and a painfully prejudiced anticipation of the next fifty. At any rate, it is in intention a solid and practical appeal to experience and results, and has no affinity to a restless love of change for the sake of

change. No doubt, in the progress of the controversy, the assailants of the House of Lords attack the principle of birth. But the principle of birth is not attacked from the *a priori* point of view. The whole force of the attack lies in what is taken to be the attested fact that the principle of a hereditary chamber supervising an elective chamber has worked, is working, and will go on working, inconveniently, stupidly, and dangerously. Finally, there is the question of the Irish Union. Is it the English or Scottish Crowd that is charged with a wanton desire to recast the Union? Nobody knows much about the matter who is not perfectly aware that the English statesman, whoever he may be, who undertakes the inevitable task of dealing with the demand for Home Rule, will have to make his case very plain indeed in order to make the cause popular here. Then is it the Irish Crowd? Sir Henry Maine, of all men, is not likely to believe that a sentiment which the wisest people of all parties in Ireland for a hundred years have known to lie in the depths of the mind of the great bulk of the Irish population, to whom we have now for the first time given the chance of

declaring their wishes, is no more than a gratuitous and superficial passion for change for its own sake. The sentiment of Irish nationality may or may not be able to justify itself in the eye of prudential reason, and English statesmen may or may not have been wise in inviting it to explode. Those are different questions. But Sir Henry Maine himself admits in another connection (p. 83) that "vague and shadowy as are the recommendations of what is called a Nationality, a State founded on this principle has generally one real practical advantage, through its obliteration of small tyrannies and local oppressions." It is not to be denied that it is exactly the expectation of this very practical advantage that has given its new vitality to the Irish National movement which seems now once more, for good or for evil, to have come to a head. When it is looked into, then, the case against the multitudes who are as senselessly eager to change institutions as other multitudes once were to break off the noses of saints in stone, falls to pieces at every point.

Among other vices ascribed to democracy, we are told that it is against science, and that "even

in our day vaccination is in the utmost danger" (p. 98). The instance is for various reasons not a happy one. It is not even precisely stated. I have never understood that vaccination is in much danger. Compulsory vaccination is perhaps in danger. But compulsion, as a matter of fact, was strengthened as the franchise went lower. It is a comparative novelty in English legislation (1853), and as a piece of effectively enforced administration it is more novel still (1871). I admit, however, that it is not endured in the United States; and only two or three years ago it was rejected by an overwhelming majority on an appeal to the popular vote in the Swiss Confederation. Obligatory vaccination may therefore one day disappear from our statute book, if democracy has anything to do with it. But then the obligation to practise a medical rite may be inexpedient, in spite of the virtues of the rite itself. That is not all. Sir Henry Maine will admit that Mr. Herbert Spencer is not against science, and he expresses in the present volume his admiration for Mr. Spencer's work on *Man and the State.* Mr. Spencer is the resolute opponent of compulsory vaccination, and a resolute

denier, moreover, of the pretension that the evidence for the advantages of vaccination takes such account of the ulterior effects in the system as to amount to a scientific demonstration. Therefore, if science demands compulsory vaccination, democracy in rejecting the demand, and even if it went further, is at least kept in countenance by some of those who are of the very household of science. The illustration is hardly impressive enough for the proposition that it supports.

Another and a far more momentous illustration occurs on another page (37). A very little consideration is enough to show that it will by no means bear Sir Henry Maine's construction. "There is, in fact," he says, "just enough evidence to show that even now there is a marked antagonism between democratic opinion and scientific truth as applied to human societies. The central seat in all Political Economy was from the first occupied by the theory of Population. This theory . . . has become the central truth of biological science. Yet it is evidently disliked by the multitude and those whom the multitude permits to lead it."

Sir Henry Maine goes on to say that it has long been intensely unpopular in France, and this, I confess, is a surprise to me. It has usually been supposed that a prudential limitation of families is rooted in the minds and habits of nearly, though not quite, all classes of the French nation. An excellent work on France, written by a sound English observer seven or eight years ago, chances to be lying before me at the moment, and here is a passage taken almost at random. "The opinions of thoughtful men seem to tend towards the wish to introduce into France some of that improvidence which allows English people to bring large families into the world without first securing the means of keeping them, and which has peopled the continent of North America and the Australian colonies with an English-speaking race" (Richardson's *Corn and Cattle Producing Districts of France*, p. 47, etc.). Surely this is a well-established fact. It is possible that denunciations of Malthus may occasionally be found both in Clerical and Socialistic prints, but then there are reasons for that. It can hardly be made much of a charge against French democracy that it tolerates unscientific

opinion, so long as it cultivates scientific practice.

As for our own country, and those whom the multitude permits to lead it, we cannot forget that by far the most popular and powerful man *in fæce Romuli*—as Sir Henry Maine insists on our putting it in that polite way—was tried and condemned not many years ago for publishing a certain pamphlet which made a limitation of population the very starting-point of social reform. It is not necessary to pronounce an opinion on the particular counsels of the pamphlet, but the motives which prompted its circulation (motives admitted to be respectable by the Chief-Justice who tried the case), and the extraordinary reception of the pamphlet by the serious portion of the workmen of the towns, would make a careful writer think twice before feeling sure that popular bodies will never listen to the truth about population. No doubt, as Sir Henry Maine says in the same place, certain classes now resist schemes for relieving distress by emigration. But there is a pretty obvious reason for that. That reason is not mere aversion to face the common sense of the relations

between population and subsistence, but a growing suspicion—as to the reasonableness of which, again, I give no opinion—that emigration is made into an easy and slovenly substitute for a scientific reform in our system of holding and using land. In the case of Ireland, other political considerations must be added.

Democracy will be against science, we admit, in one contingency: if it loses the battle with the Ultramontane Church. The worst enemy of science is also the bitterest enemy of democracy, *c'est le cléricalisme.* The interests of science and the interests of democracy are one. Let us take a case. Suppose that popular Government in France were to succumb, a military or any other more popular Government would be forced to lean on Ultramontanes. Ultramontanes would gather the spoils of democratic defeat. Sir Henry Maine is much too well informed to think that a clerical triumph would be good for science, whatever else it might be good for. Then are not propositions about democracy being against science very idle and a little untrue? "Modern politics," said a wise man (Pattison, *Sermons,* p. 191) "resolve themselves into the struggle

between knowledge and tradition." Democracy is hardly on the side of tradition.

We have dwelt on these secondary matters, because they show that the author hardly brings to the study of modern democracy the ripe preparation of detail which he gave to ancient law. In the larger field of his speculation, the value of his thought is seriously impaired by the absence of anything like a philosophy of society as a whole. Nobody who has studied Burke, or Comte, or Mill—I am not sure whether we should not add even De Maistre—can imagine any of them as setting to work on a general political speculation without reference to particular social conditions. They would have conducted the inquiry in strict relation to the stage at which a community happened to be, in matters lying outside of the direct scope of political government. So, before all other living thinkers, should we have expected Sir Henry Maine to do. It is obvious that systems of government, called by the same name, bearing the same superficial marks, founded and maintained on the same nominal principles, framed in the same verbal forms, may yet work with infinite

diversity of operation, according to the variety of social circumstances around them. Yet it is here inferred that democracy in England must be fragile, difficult, and sundry other evil things, because out of fourteen Presidents of the Bolivian Republic thirteen have died assassinated or in exile. If England and Bolivia were at all akin in history, religion, race, industry, the fate of Bolivian Presidents would be more instructive to English Premiers.

One of the propositions which Sir Henry Maine is most anxious to bring home to his readers is that Democracy, in the extreme form to which it tends, is of all kinds of government by far the most difficult. He even goes so far as to say (p. 87) that, while not denying to Democracies some portion of the advantage which Bentham claimed for them, and "putting this advantage at the highest, it is *more than compensated* by one great disadvantage," namely, its difficulty. This generalisation is repeated with an emphasis that surprises us, for two reasons. In the first place, if the proposition could be proved to be true, we fail to see that it would be particularly effective in its practical

bearings. Everybody whose opinions are worth consideration, and everybody who has ever come near the machinery of democratic government, is only too well aware that whether it be far the most difficult form of government or not, it is certainly difficult enough to tax the powers of statesmanship to the very uttermost. Is not that enough? Is anything gained by pressing us further than that? "Better be a poor fisherman," said Danton as he walked in the last hours of his life on the banks of the Aube, "better be a poor fisherman, than meddle with the governing of men." We wonder whether there has been a single democratic leader either in France or England who has not incessantly felt the full force of Danton's ejaculation. There may, indeed, be simpletons in the political world who dream that if only the system of government were made still more popular, all would be plain sailing. But then Sir Henry Maine is not the man to write for simpletons.

The first reason, then, for surprise at the immense stress laid by the author on the proposition about the difficulty of popular government is that it would not be of the first order of

importance if it were true. Our second reason is that it cannot be shown to be true. You cannot measure the relative difficulty of diverse systems of government. Governments are things of far too great complexity for precise quantification of this sort. Will anybody, for example, read through the second volume of the excellent work of M. Leroy-Beaulieu on the Empire of the Czars (1882), and then be prepared to maintain that democracy is more difficult than autocracy? It would be interesting, too, to know whether the Prince on whose shoulders will one day be laid the burden of the German Empire will read the dissertation on the unparalleled difficulties of democracy with acquiescence. There are many questions, of which the terms are no sooner stated than we at once see that a certain and definite answer to them is impossible. The controversy as to the relative fragility, or the relative difficulty, of popular government and other forms of government, appears to be a controversy of this kind. We cannot decide it until we have weighed, measured, sifted, and tested a great mass of heterogeneous facts; and then, supposing the process to have been ever so

skilfully and laboriously performed, no proposition could be established as the outcome, that would be an adequate reward for the pains of the operation.

This, we venture to think, must be pronounced a grave drawback to the value of the author's present speculation. He attaches an altogether excessive and unscientific importance to form. It would be unreasonable to deny to a writer on democracy as a form of government the right of isolating his phenomenon. But it is much more unreasonable to predicate fragility, difficulty, or anything else of a particular form of government, without reference to other conditions which happen to go along with it in a given society at a given time. None of the properties of popular government are independent of surrounding circumstances, social, economic, religious, and historic. All the conditions are bound up together in a closely interdependent connection, and are not secondary to, or derivative from, the mere form of government. It is, if not impossible, at least highly unsafe to draw inferences about forms of government in universals.

No writer seems to us to approach Machiavelli

in the acuteness with which he pushes behind mere political names, and passes on to the real differences that may exist in movements and institutions that are covered by the same designation. Nothing in its own way can be more admirable, for instance, than his reflections on the differences between democracy at Florence and democracy in old Rome—how the first began in great inequality of conditions, and ended in great equality, while the process was reversed in the second; how at Rome the people and the nobles shared power and office, while at Florence the victors crushed and ruined their adversaries; how at Rome the people, by common service with the nobles, acquired some of their virtues, while at Florence the nobles were forced down to seem, as well as to be, like the common people (*Istorie Fiorentine*, bk. iii.).

This is only an example of the distinctions and qualifications which it is necessary to introduce before we can prudently affirm or deny anything about political institutions in general terms. Who would deny that both the stability and the degree of difficulty of popular government are closely connected in the United States

with the abundance of accessible land? Who would deny that in Great Britain they are closely connected with the greater or less prosperity of our commerce and manufactures? To take another kind of illustration from Mr. Dicey's brilliant and instructive volume on the Law of the Constitution. The governments of England and of France are both of them popular in form; but does not a fundamental difference in their whole spirit and working result from the existence in one country of the *droit administratif*, and the absolute predominance in the other of regular law, applied by the ordinary courts, and extending equally over all classes of citizens? Distinctions and differences of this order go for nothing in the pages before us; yet they are vital to the discussion.

The same fallacious limitation, the same exclusion of the many various causes that co-operate in the production of political results, is to be discerned in nearly every argument. The author justly calls attention to the extraordinary good luck which has befallen us as a nation. He proceeds to warn us that if the desire for legislative innovation be allowed to grow upon

us at its present pace—pace assumed to be very headlong indeed—the chances are that our luck will not last. We shall have a disaster like Sedan, or the loss of Alsace Lorraine (p. 151). This is a curiously narrow reading of contemporary history. Did Austria lose Sadowa, or was the French Empire ruined at Sedan, in consequence of the passion of either of those Governments for legislative innovations; or must we not rather, in order to explain these striking events, look to a large array of military, geographical, financial, diplomatic, and dynastic considerations and conditions? If so, what becomes of the moral? England is, no doubt, the one great civilised power that has escaped an organic or structural change within the last five-and-twenty years. Within that period, the American Union, after a tremendous war, has revolutionised the social institutions of the South, and reconstructed the constitution. The French Empire has foundered, and a French Republic once more bears the fortunes of a great State over troubled waters. Germany has undergone a complete transformation; so has the Italian peninsula. The internal and the

external relations alike of the Austrian Power are utterly different to-day from what they were twenty years ago. Spain has passed from monarchy to republic, and back to monarchy again, and gone from dynasty to dynasty. But what share had legislative innovation in producing these great changes? No share at all in any one case. What is the logic, then, of the warning that if we persist in our taste for legislative innovation, we shall lose our immunity from the violent changes that have overtaken other States—changes with which legislative innovation had nothing to do?

In short, modern societies, whether autocratic or democratic, are passing through a great transformation, social, religious, and political. The process is full of embarrassments, difficulties, and perils. These are the dominant marks of our era. To set them all down to popular government is as narrow, as confused, and as unintelligent as the imputation in a papal Encyclical of all modern ills to Liberalism. You cannot isolate government, and judge it apart from the other and deeper forces of the time. Western civilisation is slowly entering on a new stage. Form of

government is the smallest part of it. It has been well said that those nations have the best chance of escaping a catastrophe in the obscure and uncertain march before us, who find a way of opening the most liberal career to the aspirations of the present, without too rudely breaking with all the traditions of the past. This is what popular government, wisely guided, is best able to do.

But will wise guidance be endured? Sir Henry Maine seems to think that it will not. Mill thought that it would. In a singularly luminous passage in an essay which for some reason or another he never republished, Mill says—

"We are the last persons to undervalue the power of moral convictions. But the convictions of the mass of mankind run hand in hand with their interests or their class feelings. *We have a strong faith, stronger than either politicians or philosophers generally have, in the influence of reason and virtue over men's minds;* but it is in that of the reason and virtue of their own side of the question. We expect few conversions by the mere force of reason from one creed to the other. Men's intellects and hearts have a large share in determining what *sort* of Conservatives or Liberals they will be; but it is their position (saving individual exceptions) which makes them Conservatives or Liberals."

This double truth points to the good grounds that exist why we should think hopefully of popular government, and why we should be slow to believe that it has no better foundation to build upon than the unreal assumptions of some bad philosophers, French or others.

A FEW WORDS ON FRENCH MODELS.[1]

Nunquamne reponam,
Vexatus toties rauci Theseide Codri?

HISTORIANS are only too fond of insisting on the effect of the French Revolution in checking English reform. One of the latest of them dwells on the fatal influence of this great event in our own country, in checking, blighting, and distorting the natural progress of things. But for that influence, he says, the closing years of the century would probably have seen the abolition of the English Slave Trade, the reform of Parliament, and the repeal of the Test Act.[2] The question of the precise degree of vitality in sectarian pride, and of tenacity in a great material interest, a hundred years ago or at any time, is not very easy to settle. It is quite possible that the Slave Trade and the Test Act

[1] March 1888. [2] Lecky, vi. 297.

might have died nearly as hard, if there had been no French Revolution. In any case, it is a curious implication that underlies all writing in this familiar vein, that France ought to have gone on with a bad government, in order to secure to England the advantages of a good one.

As to one disservice, however, there can be no doubt. The French Revolution has furnished the enemies of each successive proposal of reform with a boundless supply of prejudicial analogies, appalling parallels, and ugly nicknames, which are all just as conclusive with the unwise as if they were the aptest arguments. Sydney Smith might well put "the awful example of a neighbouring nation" among the standing topics of the Noodle's Oration. The abolition of rotten boroughs brought down a thousand ominous references to noyades, fusillades, and guillotines. When Sir Robert Peel took the duty off corn, Croker warned him with great solemnity that he was breaking up the old interests, dividing the great families, and beginning exactly such a castastrophe as did the Noailles and the Montmorencis in 1789. Cobden and Bright were

promiscuously likened to Babœuf, Chaumette, and Anacharsis Clootz. Babœuf, it is true, was for dividing up all property, and Chaumette was an aggressive atheist; but these were mere *nuances*, not material to the purposes of obloquy. Robespierre, Danton, Marat have been mercilessly trotted forth in their sanguinary shrouds, and treated as the counterparts and precursors of worthies so obviously and exactly like them as Mr. Beales and Mr. Odger; while an innocent caucus for the registration of voters recalls to some well-known writers lurid visions of the Cordeliers and the Jacobin Club.

A recent addition has been made to the stock of nicknames drawn from the terrible melodrama of the last century. The Chancellor of the Exchequer at Dublin described the present very humble writer as "the Saint-Just of our Revolution." The description was received with lively applause. It would be indelicate to wonder how many in a hundred, even in that audience of the elect, had ever heard of Saint-Just, how many in five hundred could have spelt his name, and how many in a thousand could have told any three facts in his career. But let us muse for a

moment upon the portrait. I take down the first picture of Saint-Just that comes to my hand. M. Taine is the artist:—

"Among these energetic nullities we see gradually rising *a young monster*—with face handsome and tranquil—Saint-Just! A sort of precocious Sulla, who at five-and-twenty suddenly springs from the ranks, and *by force of atrocity wins his place!* Six years before, he began life by an act of domestic robbery: while on a visit at his mother's, he ran away in the night with her plate and jewels; for that he was locked up for six months. On his release, he employed his leisure in the composition of an odious poem. Then he flung himself head foremost into the Revolution. Blood calcined by study, a colossal pride, a conscience completely unhinged, an imagination haunted by the bloody recollections of Rome and Sparta, an intelligence falsified and twisted until it found itself most at its ease in the practice of enormous paradox, barefaced sophism, and murderous lying—all these perilous ingredients, mixed in a furnace of concentrated ambition, boiled and fermented long and silently in his breast."

It is, no doubt, hard to know ourselves. One may entertain demons unawares, and have calcined blood without being a bit the wiser. Still, I do not find the likeness striking. It would have done just as well to call me Nero, Torquemada, Iago, or Bluebeard.

Whether the present writer does or does not deserve all the compliments that history has paid to Saint-Just, is a very slight and trivial question, with which the public will naturally not much concern itself. But as some use is from time to time made of the writer's imputed delinquencies to prejudice an important cause, it is perhaps worth while to try in a page or two to give a better account of things. It is true that he has written on revolutionists like Robespierre, and destructive thinkers like Rousseau and Voltaire. It is true that he believes the two latter to have been on the whole, when all deductions are made, on the side of human progress. But what sort of foundation in this for the inference that he "finds his models in the heroes of the French Revolution," and "looks for his methods in the Reign of Terror"? It would

be equally logical to infer that because I have written, not without sympathy and appreciation, of Joseph de Maistre, I therefore find my model in a hero of the Catholic Reaction, and look for my methods in the revived supremacy of the Holy See over all secular and temporal authorities. It would be just as fair to say that because I pointed out, as it was the critic's business to do, the many admirable merits, and the important moral influences on the society of that time, of the *New Heloïsa*, therefore I am bound to think Saint Preux a very fine fellow, particularly fit to be a model and a hero for young Ireland. Only on the principle that who drives fat oxen must himself be fat, can it be held that who writes on Danton must be himself in all circumstances a Dantonist.

The most insignificant of literary contributions have a history and an origin; and the history of these contributions is short and simple enough. Carlyle with all the force of his humoristic genius had impressed upon his generation an essentially one-sided view both of the eighteenth century as a whole, and of the French thinkers of that century in particular. His essay on Diderot, his lecture on Rousseau, his chapters on Voltaire,

with all their brilliance, penetration, and incomparable satire, were the high-water mark in this country of the literary reaction against the French school of Revolution. Everybody knows the famous diatribes against the Bankrupt Century and all its men and all its works. Voltaire's furies, Diderot's indigestions, Rousseau's nauseous amours, and the odd tricks and shifts of the whole of them and their company, offered ready material for the boisterous horseplay of the transcendental humourist. Then the tide began to turn. Mr. Buckle's book on the history of civilisation had something to do with it. But it was the historical chapters in Comte's Positive Philosophy that first opened the minds of many of us, who, five-and-twenty years ago, were young men, to a very different judgment of the true place of those schools in the literary and social history of Western Europe. We learnt to perceive that though much in the thought and the lives of the literary precursors of the Revolution laid them fairly open to Carlyle's banter, yet banter was not all, and even grave condemnation was not all. In essays, like mine, written from this point of view, and with the object of trying

to trim the balance rather more correctly, it may well have been that the better side of the thinkers concerned was sometimes unduly dwelt upon, and their worse side unduly left in the background. It may well have been that an impression of personal adhesion was conveyed which only very partially existed, or even where it did not exist at all: that is a risk of misinterpretation which it is always hard for the historical critic to escape. There may have been a too eager tone; but to be eager is not a very bad vice at any age under the critical forty. There were some needlessly aggressive passages, and some sallies which ought to have been avoided, because they gave pain to good people. There was perhaps too much of the particular excitement of the time. It was the date when *Essays and Reviews* was still thought a terrible explosive; when Bishop Colenso's arithmetical tests as to the flocks and herds of the children of Israel were believed to be sapping not only the inspiration of the Pentateuch but the foundations of the Faith and the Church; and when Darwin's scientific speculations were shaking the civilised world. Some excitement was to be pardoned in days like those, and I

am quite sure that one side needed pardon at least as much as the other. For the substantial soundness of the general views which I took of the French revolutionary thinkers at that time, I feel no apprehension; nor—some possible occasional phrases or sentences excepted and apart—do I see the smallest reason to shrink or to depart from any one of them. So far as one particular reference may serve to illustrate the tenour of the whole body of criticism, the following lines, which close my chapter on the "Encyclopædia," will answer the purpose as well as any others, and I shall perhaps be excused for transcribing them:—

"An urgent social task lay before France and before Europe: it could not be postponed until the thinkers had worked out a scheme of philosophic completeness. The thinkers did not seriously make any effort after this completeness. The Encyclopædia was the most serious attempt, and it did not wholly fail. As I replace in my shelves this mountain of volumes, 'dusky and huge, enlarging on the sight,' I have a presentiment that their pages will seldom again be disturbed by me or by others. They served a great

purpose a hundred years ago. They are now a monumental ruin, clothed with all the profuse associations of history. It is no Ozymandias of Egypt, king of kings, whose wrecked shape of stone and sterile memories we contemplate. We think rather of the grey and crumbling walls of an ancient stronghold, reared by the endeavour of stout hands and faithful, whence in its own day and generation a band once went forth against barbarous hordes, to strike a blow for humanity and truth." [1]

It is gratifying to find that the same view of the work of these famous men, and of its relation to the social necessities of the time, commends itself to Mr. Lecky, who has since gone diligently and with a candid mind over the same ground.[2] Then where is the literary Jacobin?

Of course, it is easy enough to fish out a sentence or a short passage here and there which, if taken by itself, may wear a very sinister look, and carry the most alarming impressions. Not many days ago a writer addressed a letter to the *Times* which furnishes a specimen of this kind of controversy. He gave himself the ambiguous

[1] Diderot, i. 247. [2] See his vol. vi. 305 *et seq.*

designation of "Catholicus"; but his style bore traces of the equivocally Catholic climate of Munich. His aim was the lofty and magnanimous one of importing theological prejudice into the great political dispute of the day; in the interest, strange to say, of the Irish party who have been for ages the relentless oppressors of the Church to which he belongs, and who even now hate and despise it with all the virulence of a Parisian Red. This masked assailant conveys to the mind of the reader that I applaud and sympathise with the events of the winter of 1793, and more particularly with the odious procession of the Goddess of Reason at Notre Dame. He says, moreover, that I have "the effrontery to imply that the horrible massacres of the Revolution . . . were 'a very mild story compared with the atrocities of the Jews or the crimes of Catholicism.'" No really honest and competent disputant would have hit on "effrontery" as the note of the passage referred to, if he had had its whole spirit and drift before him. The reader shall, if he pleases, judge for himself. After the words just quoted, I go on to say:—

"Historical recriminations, however, are not

edifying. It is perfectly fair, when Catholics talk of the atheist Terror, to rejoin that the retainers of Anjou and Montpensier slew more men and women on the first day of the Saint Bartholomew, than perished in Paris through the Years I. and II. But the retort does us no good beyond the region of dialectic. Some of the opinions of Chaumette were full of enlightenment and hope. But it would be far better to share the superstitious opinions of a virtuous and benignant priest, like the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Misérables*, than to hold these good opinions of Chaumette, as he held them, with a rancorous intolerance, a reckless disregard of the rights and feelings of others, and a shallow forgetfulness of all that great and precious part of our nature that lies out of the domain of the logical understanding. . . . In every family where a mother sought to have her child baptised, or where sons and daughters sought to have the dying spirit of the old consoled by the last sacrament, there sprang up a bitter enemy to the government which had closed the churches and proscribed the priests. How could a society whose spiritual life had been nourished in the solemn mysticism of the

Middle Ages suddenly turn to embrace a gaudy paganism? The common self-respect of humanity was outraged by apostate priests . . . as they filed before the Convention, led by the Archbishop of Paris, and accompanied by rude acolytes bearing piles of the robes and the vessels of silver and gold with which they had once served their holy office." [1]

Where is the effrontery, the search for methods in the Reign of Terror, the applause for revolutionary models? Such inexcusable perversion of a writer's meaning for an evanescent political object—and a very shabby object too—is enough to make one think that George III. knew what he was talking about, when he once delivered himself of the saying that "Politics are a trade for a rascal, not for a gentleman."

Let me cite another more grotesque piece of irrelevancy with a similar drift. Some months ago the present writer chanced to express an opinion upon Welsh Disestablishment. Wales, at any rate, would seem to be far enough away from *Emile*, *Candide*, the Law of Prairial, and the Committee of Public Safety. The *Times*,

[1] *Misc.* i. 77-79.

however, instantly said[1] that it would be affectation to express any surprise, because my unfortunate "theories and principles, drawn from French sources and framed on French models, all tend to the disintegration of comprehensive political organisations and the encouragement of arrangements based on the minor peculiarities of race or dialect." Was there ever in the world such prodigious nonsense? What French sources, what French models? If French models point in any one direction rather than another, it is away from disintegration and straight towards centralisation. Everybody knows that this is one of the most notorious facts of French history from the days of Lewis XI. or Cardinal Richelieu down to Napoleon Bonaparte. So far from French models encouraging "arrangements based on the minor peculiarities of race and dialect," France is the first great example in modern history, for good or for evil, of a persevering process of national unification, and the firm suppression of all provincial particularismus. This is not only true of French political leaders in general: it is particularly true of the Jacobin

[1] Nov. 3, 1886.

leaders. Rousseau himself, I admit, did in one place point in the direction of confederation; but only in the sense that for freedom on the one hand, and just administration on the other, the unit should not be too large to admit of the participation of the persons concerned in the management of their own public affairs. If the Jacobins had not been overwhelmed by the necessity of keeping out the invaders, they might have developed the germ of truth in Rousseau's loose way of stating the expediency of decentralisation. As it was, above all other French schools, the Jacobins dealt most sternly with particularist pretensions. Of all men, these supposed masters, teachers, and models of mine are least to be called Separatists. To them more than to any other of the revolutionary parties the great heresy of Federalism was most odious; and if I were a faithful follower of the Jacobin model, I should have least patience with nationalist sentiment whether in Ireland, Scotland, or Wales, and should most rigorously insist on that cast-iron incorporation which, as it happens, in the case of Ireland I believe to be equally hopeless and undesirable. This explanation, therefore,

of my favour for Welsh Disestablishment is as absurdly ignorant as it is far-fetched and irrelevant.

The logical process is worth an instant's examination. The position is no less than this,—that to attempt truly to appreciate the place and the value in the history of thought and social movements of men who have been a hundred years in their graves, and to sympathise with certain sides and certain effects of their activity under the peculiar circumstances in which French society then found itself, is the same thing as binding yourself to apply their theories and to imitate their activity, under an entirely heterogeneous set of circumstances, in a different country, and in a society with wholly dissimilar requirements. That is the argument if we straighten it out. The childishness of any such contention is so obvious, that I should be ashamed of reproducing it, were it not that this very contention has made its appearance at my expense several times a month for the last two years in all sorts of important and respectable prints.

For instance, it appears that I once said somewhere that Danton looked on at the doings of his

bloodier associates with "sombre acquiescence." *Argal*, it was promptly pointed out—and I espy the dark phrase constantly adorning leading articles to this day—the man who said that Danton sombrely acquiesced in the doings of Billaud, Collot, and the rest, must of necessity, being of a firm and logical mind, himself sombrely acquiesce in moonlighting and cattle-houghing in Ireland. Apart from the curious compulsion of the reasoning, what is the actual state of the case? Acquiescence is hardly a good description of the mood of a politician who scorns delights and lives laborious days in actively fighting for a vigorous policy and an effective plan which, as he believes, would found order in Ireland on a new and more hopeful base. He may be wrong, but where is the acquiescence, whether sombre or serene?

The equally misplaced name of Fatalism is sometimes substituted for acquiescence, in criticisms of this stamp. In any such sense anybody is a fatalist who believes in a relation between cause and effect. If it is fatalism to assume that, given a certain chain of social or political antecedents, they will inevitably be followed by a

certain chain of consequences, then every sensible observer of any series of events is a fatalist Catholic Emancipation, the extension of the franchise, and secret ballot, have within the last sixty years completely shifted the balance of political power in Ireland. Land legislation has revolutionised the conditions of ownership. These vast and vital changes in Ireland have been accompanied by the transfer of decisive power from aristocracy to numbers in Great Britain, and Great Britain is arbiter. Is it fatalism, or is it common sense, to perceive that one new effect of new causes so potent must be the necessity of changing the system of Irish government? To dream that you could destroy the power of the old masters without finding new, and that having invited the nation to speak you could continue to ignore the national sentiment was and is the very height of political folly, and the longer the dream is persisted in the ruder will be the awakening. Surely the stupidest fatalism is far more truly to be ascribed to those who insist that Ireland was eternally predestined to turmoil, confusion, and torment; that there alone the event defies calculation; and that, how-

ever wisely, carefully and providently you modify or extinguish causes, in Ireland, though nowhere else, effects will still survive with shape unaltered and force unabated.

No author has a right to assume that anybody has read all his books or any of them, but he may reasonably claim that he shall not be publicly classified, labelled, catalogued, and placed in the shelves, on the strength of half of his work, and that half arbitrarily selected. If it be permitted to me without excess of egotism to name the masters to whom I went to school in the days of early manhood, so far from being revolutionists and terrorists, they belonged entirely to the opposite camp. Austin's *Jurisprudence* and Mill's *Logic* and *Utilitarianism* were everything, and Rousseau's *Social Contract* was nothing. To the best of my knowledge and belief, I never said a word about "Natural Rights" in any piece of practical public business in all my life; and when that famous phrase again made its naked appearance on the platform three or four years ago, it gave me as much surprise and dismay as if I were this afternoon to meet a Deinotherium shambling down

Parliament Street. Mill was the chief influence for me, as he was for most of my contemporaries in those days. Experience of life and independent use of one's mind—which he would have been the most ready of men to applaud—have since, as is natural, led to many important corrections and deductions in Mill's political and philosophical teaching. But then we were disciples, and not critics; and nobody will suppose that the admirer of Wordsworth, the author of the Essay on Coleridge, and of the treatise on Representative Government, the administrator in the most bureaucratic and authoritative of public services, was a terrorist or an unbridled democrat, or anything else but the most careful and rationalistic of political theorisers. It was Mill who first held up for my admiration the illustrious man whom Austin enthusiastically called the "godlike Turgot," and it was he who encouraged me to write a study on that great and inspiring character. I remember the suspicion and the murmurings with which Louis Blanc, then living in brave and honourable exile in London, and the good friend of so many of us, and who was really a literary

Jacobin to the tips of his fingers, remonstrated against that piece of what he thought grievously misplaced glorification. Turgot was, indeed, a very singular hero with whom to open the career of literary Jacobin. So was Burke,— the author of those wise sentences that still ring in our ears: "*The question with me is, not whether you have a right to render your people miserable, but whether it is not your interest to make them happy. It is not what a lawyer tells me I may do, but what humanity, reason, and justice tell me I ought to do. Nobody shall persuade me, where a whole people are concerned, that acts of lenity are not means of conciliation.*" Burke, Austin, Mill, Turgot, Comte — what strange sponsors for the "theories and principles of the Terror"!

What these opinions came to, roughly speaking, was something to this effect: That the power alike of statesmen and of publicists over the course of affairs is strictly limited; that institutions and movements are not capable of immediate or indefinite modification by any amount of mere will; that political truths are always relative, and never absolute; that the test of

practical, political, and social proposals is not their conformity to abstract ideals, but to convenience, utility, expediency, and occasion; that for the reformer, considerations of time and place may be paramount; and finally, as Mill himself has put it, that government is always either in the hands, or passing into the hands, of whatever is the strongest power in society, and that what this power is, and shall be, depends less on institutions than institutions depend upon it. If I were pressed for an illustration of these principles at work, inspiring the minds and guiding the practice of responsible statesmen in great transactions of our own day and generation, I should point to the sage, the patient, the triumphant action of Abraham Lincoln in the emancipation of the negro slaves. However that may be, contrast a creed of this kind with the abstract, absolute, geometric, unhistoric, peremptory notions and reasonings that formed the stock in trade of most, though not quite all, of the French revolutionists, alike in action and in thought. It is plain that they are the direct opposite and contradictory of one another.

To clench the matter by chapter and verse, I should like to recall what I have said of these theories and principles in their most perfect and most important literary version. How have I described Rousseau's *Social Contract*? It placed, I said, the centre of social activity elsewhere than in careful and rational examination of social conditions, and careful and rational effort to modify them. It substituted a retrograde aspiration for direction, and emotion for the discovery of law. It overlooked the crucial difficulty—namely, how to summon new force, without destroying the sound parts of a structure which it has taken many generations to erect. Its method was geometric instead of being historic, and hence its "desperate absurdity." Its whole theory was constructed with an imperfect consideration of the qualities of human nature, and with too narrow a view of society. It ignored the great fact that government is the art of wisely dealing with huge groups of conflicting interests, of hostile passions, of hardly reconcilable aims, of vehemently opposed forces. It "gives us not the least help towards the solution of any of the problems of actual government."

Such language as all this is hardly that of a disciple to a master, in respect of theories and principles which he is making his own for the use of a lifetime. "There has been no attempt" [in these pages], I said in winding up, "to palliate either the shallowness or the practical mischievousness of the *Social Contract*. But there is another side to its influence. We should be false to our critical principle, if we do not recognise the historical effect of a speculation scientifically valueless." Any writer would have stamped himself as both unfit for the task that I had undertaken, and entirely below the level of the highest critical standard of the day, if he had for a moment dreamed of taking any other point of view.

As for historical hero-worship, after Carlyle's fashion, whether with Jacobin idols or any other, it is a mood of mind that must be uncongenial to anybody who had ever been at all under the influence of Mill. Without being so foolish as to disparage the part played by great men in great crises, we could have no sympathy with the barbaric and cynical school, who make greatness identical with violence, force, and mere

iron will. Cromwell said, in vindication of himself, that England had need of a constable, and it was true. The constable, the soldier, the daring counsellor at the helm, are often necessities of the time. It is often a necessity of the time that the energy of a nation or of a movement should gather itself up in a resolute band or a resolute chief; as the revolutionary energy of France gathered itself up in the greater Jacobins, or that of England in Oliver Cromwell. Goethe says that nature bids us "*Take all, but pay.*" Revolutions and heroes may give us all, but not without price. This is at the best, and the best is the exception. The grandiose types mostly fail. In our own day, people talk, for example, with admiration of Cromwell's government in Ireland,—as if it were a success, instead of being one of the worst chapters in the whole history of Irish failure. It was force carried to its utmost. Hundreds were put to the sword, thousands were banished to be slaves of the planters in the West Indies, and the remnant were driven miserably off into the desolate wilds of Connaught. But all this only prepared the way for further convulsions and deadlier discontent.

It is irrational to contrast Carlyle's heroes, Cromwell, Mirabeau, Frederick, Napoleon, with men like Washington or Lincoln. The circumstances were different. The conditions of public use and of personal greatness were different. But if we are to talk of ideals, heroes, and models, I, for one, should hardly look to France at all. Jefferson was no flatterer of George Washington; but his character of Washington comes far nearer to the right pattern of a great ruler than can be found in any of Carlyle's splendid dithyrambs, and it is no waste of time to recall and to transcribe it:—

"His mind was great and powerful, without being of the very first order; his penetration strong, though not so acute as that of a Newton, Bacon, or Locke; and as far as he saw, no judgment was ever sounder. It was slow in operation, being little aided by invention or imagination, but sure in conclusion. Hence the common remark of his officers, of the advantage he derived from councils of war, where, hearing all suggestions, he selected whatever was best; and certainly no general ever planned his battles more judiciously. But if deranged during the course of the action, if any member of his plan was dislocated by sudden circumstances, he was slow in a readjustment. He was incapable of fear, meeting personal dangers with the calmest unconcern. Perhaps the strongest feature in

his character was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed; refraining if he saw a doubt, but when once decided, going through with his purpose, whatever obstacles opposed. His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known; no motives of interest or consanguinity, of friendship or hatred, being able to bias his decision. He was, indeed, in every sense of the word, a wise, a good, and a great man. His temper was naturally irritable and high toned; but reflection and resolution had obtained a firm and habitual ascendency over it."

In conclusion, the plain truth is that all parallels, analogies, and similitudes between the French Revolution, or any part or phase of it, and our affairs in Ireland are moonshine. For the practical politician his problem is always individual. For his purposes history never repeats itself. Human nature, doubtless, has a weakness for a precedent; it is a weakness to be respected. But there is no such thing as an essential reproduction of social and political combinations of circumstance. To talk about Robespierre in connection with Ireland is just as idle as it was in Robespierre to harangue about Lycurgus and Brutus in Paris. To compare the two is to place Ireland under a

preposterous magnifying-glass of monstrous dimension. Nor is disparity of scale the only difference, vital as that is. In no one of the leading characteristics of a community in a state of ferment, save the odium that surrounds the landlords, and that not universal, does Ireland to-day really resemble the France of a hundred years ago. Manners, ideas, beliefs, traditions, crumbling institutions, rising aspirations, the ordering of castes and classes, the rivalry of creeds, the relations with the governing power—all constitute elements of such radical divergence as to make comparison between modern Ireland and revolutionary France for any more serious purpose than giving a conventional and familiar point to a sentence, entirely worthless.

It is pure dilettantism, again, to seek the moral of Irish commotions in the insurrection of La Vendée. That, as somebody has said, was like a rising of the ancient Gauls at the voice of the Druids, and led by their great chiefs. It will be time enough to compare La Vendée with Ireland when the peasantry take the field against the British Government with Beresfords, Fitzgeralds, and Bourkes at their head. If the

Vendéans had risen to drive out the Charettes, the Bonchamps, the Larochejacquelins, the parallel would have been nearer the mark. The report of the Devon Commission, the green pamphlet containing an account of the famous three days' discussion between O'Connell and Butt in the Dublin Corporation in 1843, or half a dozen of Lord Clare's speeches between 1793 and 1800, will give a clearer insight into the Irish problem than a bushel of books about the Vendéan or any other episode of the Revolution.

Equally frivolous is it, for any useful purpose of practical enlightenment, to draw parallels between the action of the Catholic clergy in Ireland to-day and that of the French clergy on the eve of the Revolution. There is no sort of force in the argument that because the French clergy fared ill at the Revolution,[1] therefore the Irish clergy will fare ill when self-government is bestowed on Ireland. Such talk is mere ingenious guess-work at best, with-

[1] The Church did not fare so very ill, after all. The State, in 1790, undertook the debts of the Church to the tune of 130,000,000 livres, and assured it an annual Budget of rather more than that amount.—Boiteau's *Etat de la France*, p. 202.

out any of the foundations of a true historical analogy. The differences between the two cases are obvious, and they go to the heart of the matter. For instance, the men who came to the top of affairs in France were saturated both with speculative unbelief for one thing, and with active hatred of the Church for another. In Ireland, on the contrary, there is no speculative unbelief, as O'Connell used so constantly to boast; and the Church being poor, voluntary, and intensely national and popular, has nourished none of those gross and swollen abuses which provoked the not unreasonable animosity of revolutionary France. In truth, it is with precisely as much or as little reason that most of the soothsayers and prognosticators of evil take the directly opposite line. Instead of France these persons choose, as they have an equally good right to do, to look for precedents to Spain, Belgium, or South America. Why not? They assure us, in their jingling phrase, that Home Rule means Rome Rule, that the priests will be the masters, and that Irish autonomy is only another name for the reign of bigotry, superstition, and obscurantism. One of these two mutually destructive

predictions has just as much to say for itself as the other, and no more. We may leave the prophets to fight it out between them while we attend to our business, and examine facts and probabilities as they are, without the aid of capriciously adopted precedents and fantastical analogies.

Parallels from France, or anywhere else, may supply literary amusement; they may furnish a weapon in the play of controversy. They shed no light and do no service as we confront the solid facts of the business to be done. Lewis the Fourteenth was the author of a very useful and superior commonplace when he wrote: "No man who is badly informed can avoid reasoning badly. I believe that whoever is rightly instructed, and rightly persuaded of *all the facts*, would never do anything else but what he ought." Another great French ruler, who, even more than Lewis, had a piercing eye for men and the world of action, said that the mind of a general ought to be like a field-glass, and as clear; to see things exactly as they are, *et jamais se faire des tableaux*,—never to compose the objects before him into pictures. The same

maxim is nearly as good for the man who has to conquer difficulties in the field of government; and analogies and parallels are one way of substituting pictures for plans and charts. Just because the statesman's problem is individual, history can give him little help. I am not so graceless as to depreciate history or literature either for public or for private persons. "You are a man," Napoleon said to Goethe; and there is no reason why literature should prevent the reader of books from being a man; why it should blind him to the great practical truths that the end of life is not to think but to will; that everything in the world has its decisive moment, which statesmen know and seize; that the genius of politics, as a great man of letters truly wrote, has not "All or Nothing" for its motto, but seeks on the contrary to extract the greatest advantage from situations the most compromised, and never flings the helve after the hatchet. Like literature the use of history in politics is to refresh, to open, to make the mind generous and hospitable; to enrich, to impart flexibility, to quicken and nourish political imagination and invention, to instruct

in the common difficulties and the various experiences of government; to enable a statesman to place himself at a general and spacious standpoint. All this, whether it be worth much or little, and it is surely worth much, is something wholly distinct from directly aiding a statesman in the performance of a specific task. In such a case an analogy from history, if he be not sharply on his guard, is actually more likely than not to mislead him. I certainly do not mean the history of the special problem itself. Of that he cannot possibly know too much, nor master its past course and foregone bearings too thoroughly. Ireland is a great standing instance. There is no more striking example of the disastrous results of trying to overcome political difficulties without knowing how they came into existence, and where they have their roots. The only history that furnishes a clue in Irish questions is the history of Ireland and the people who have lived in it or have been driven out of it.

ON THE
STUDY OF LITERATURE.[1]

When my friend Mr. Goschen invited me to discharge the duty which has fallen to me this afternoon I confess that I complied with many misgivings. He desired me to say something on the literary side of education. Now, it is almost impossible—and I think those who know most of literature will be readiest to agree with me—to say anything new in recommendation of literature in a scheme of education. I have felt, however, that Mr. Goschen has worked with such zeal and energy for so many years on behalf of this good cause, that anybody whom he considered able to render him any co-operation owed it to him in its fullest extent. The Lord Mayor has been kind enough to say that I am especially qualified to

[1] The annual address to the students of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching, delivered at the Mansion House, February 26th, 1887.

speak on English literature. I must, however, remind the Lord Mayor that I have strayed from literature into the region of politics; and I am not at all sure that such a journey conduces to the aptness of one's judgment on literary subjects, or adds much to the force of one's arguments on behalf of literary study. Politics are a field where action is one long second-best, and where the choice constantly lies between two blunders. Nothing can be more unlike in aim, in ideals, in method, and in matter, than are literature and politics. I have, however, determined to do the best that I can; and I feel how great an honour it is to be invited to partake in a movement which I do not hesitate to call one of the most important of all those now taking place in English society.

What is the object of the movement? What do the promoters aim at? I take it that what they design is to bring the very best teaching that the country can afford, through the hands of the most thoroughly competent men, within the reach of every class of the community. Their object is to give to the many that sound, systematic, and methodical knowledge, which has

hitherto been the privilege of the few who can afford the time and money to go to Oxford and Cambridge; to diffuse the fertilising waters of intellectual knowledge from their great and copious fountain-heads at the Universities by a thousand irrigating channels over the whole length and breadth of our busy, indomitable land. Gentlemen, this is a most important point. Goethe said that nothing is more frightful than a teacher who only knows what his scholars are intended to know. We may depend upon it that the man who knows his own subject most thoroughly is most likely to excite interest about it in the minds of other people. We hear, perhaps more often than we like, that we live in a democratic age. It is true enough, and I can conceive nothing more democratic than such a movement as this, nothing which is more calculated to remedy defects that are incident to democracy, more thoroughly calculated to raise modern democracy to heights which other forms of government and older orderings of society have never yet attained. No movement can be more wisely democratic than one which seeks to give to the northern miner or the London artisan

knowledge as good and as accurate, though he may not have so much of it, as if he were a student at Oxford or Cambridge. Something of the same kind may be said of the new frequency with which scholars of great eminence and consummate accomplishments, like Jowett, Lang, Myers, Leaf, and others, bring all their scholarship to bear, in order to provide for those who are not able, or do not care, to read old classics in the originals, brilliant and faithful renderings of them in our own tongue. Nothing but good, I am persuaded, can come of all these attempts to connect learning with the living forces of society, and to make industrial England a sharer in the classic tradition of the lettered world.

I am well aware that there is an apprehension that the present extraordinary zeal for education in all its forms—elementary, secondary, and higher—may bear in its train some evils of its own. It is said that before long nobody in England will be content to practise a handicraft, and that every one will insist on being at least a clerk. It is said that the moment is even already at hand when a great deal of practical distress does and must result from this tendency. I

remember years ago that in the United States I heard something of the same kind. All I can say is, that this tendency, if it exists, is sure to right itself. In no case can the spread of so mischievous a notion as that knowledge and learning ought not to come within reach of handicraftsmen be attributed to literature. There is a familiar passage in which Pericles, the great Athenian, describing the glory of the community of which he was so far-shining a member, says, "We at Athens are lovers of the beautiful, yet simple in our tastes; we cultivate the mind without loss of manliness." But then remember that after all Athenian society rested on a basis of slavery. Athenian citizens were able to pursue their love of the beautiful, and their simplicity, and to cultivate their minds without loss of manliness, because the drudgery and hard work and rude service of society were performed by those who had no share in all these good things. With us, happily, it is very different. We are all more or less upon a level. Our object is—and it is that which in my opinion raises us infinitely above the Athenian level—to bring the Periclean ideas

of beauty and simplicity and cultivation of the mind within the reach of those who do the drudgery and the service and rude work of the world. And it can be done—do not let us be afraid—it can be done without in the least degree impairing the skill of our handicraftsmen or the manliness of our national life. It can be done without blunting or numbing the practical energies of our people.

I know they say that if you meddle with literature you are less qualified to take your part in practical affairs. You run a risk of being labelled a dreamer and a theorist. But, after all, if we take the very highest form of all practical energy — the governing of the country—all this talk is ludicrously untrue. I venture to say that in the present Government [1887], including the Prime Minister, there are three men at least who are perfectly capable of earning their bread as men of letters. In the late Government, besides the Prime Minister, there were also three men of letters, and I have never heard that those three were greater simpletons than their neighbours. There is a Commission now at work on that very im-

portant and abstruse subject—the Currency. I am told that no one there displays so acute an intelligence of the difficulties that are to be met, and so ready an apprehension of the important arguments that are brought forward, and the practical ends to be achieved, as the chairman of the Commission, who is not what is called a practical man, but a man of study, literature, theoretical speculation, and university training.[1] Oh no, gentlemen, some of the best men of business in the country are men who have had the best collegian's equipment, and are the most accomplished bookmen.

It is true that we cannot bring to London, with this movement, the indefinable charm that haunts the grey and venerable quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge. We cannot take you into the stately halls, the silent and venerable libraries, the solemn chapels, the studious old-world gardens. We cannot surround you with all those elevated memorials and sanctifying associations of scholars and poets, of saints and sages, that march in glorious procession through the ages, and make of Oxford and

[1] Mr. Arthur Balfour.

Cambridge a dream of music for the inward ear, and of delight for the contemplative eye. We cannot bring all that to you; but I hope, and I believe, it is the object of those who are more intimately connected with the society than I have been, that every partaker of the benefits of this society will feel himself and herself in living connection with those two famous centres, and feel conscious of the links that bind the modern to the older England. One of the most interesting facts mentioned in your report this year is that last winter four prizes of £10 each were offered in the mining district of Northumberland, one each to the male and female student in every term who should take the highest place in the examination, in order to enable them to spend a month in Cambridge in the long vacation for the purpose of carrying on in the laboratories and museums the work in which they had been engaged in the winter at the local centre. That is not a step taken by our society; but the University of Cambridge has inspired and worked out the scheme, and I am not without hope that from London some of those who attend these

classes may be able to realise in person the attractions and the associations of these two great historic sites. One likes to think how poor scholars three or four hundred years ago used to flock to Oxford, regardless of cold, privation, and hardship, so that they might satisfy their hunger and thirst for knowledge. I like to think of them in connection with this movement. I like to think of them in connection with students like those miners in Northumberland, whom I know well, and who are mentioned in the report of the Cambridge Extension Society as, after a day's hard work in the pit, walking four or five miles through cold and darkness and rough roads to hear a lecture, and then walking back again the same four or five miles. You must look for the same enthusiasm, the same hunger and thirst for knowledge, that presided over the foundation of the Universities many centuries ago, to carry on this work, to strengthen and stimulate men's faith in knowledge, their hopes from it, and their zeal for it.

Speaking now of the particular kind of knowledge of which I am going to say a few words—

how does literature fare in these important operations? Last term, out of fifty-seven courses in the Cambridge scheme, there were ten on literature; out of thirty-one of our courses, seven were on literature. I am bound to say I think that such a position for literature in the scheme is very reasonably satisfactory. I have made some inquiries, since I knew that I was going to speak here, in the great popular centres of industry in the North and in Scotland as to the popularity of literature as a subject of teaching, I find very much what I should have expected. The professors all tell very much the same story, and this is, that it is extremely hard to interest any considerable number of people in subjects that seem to have no direct bearing upon the practical work of everyday life. There is a disinclination to study literature for its own sake, or to study anything which does not seem to have a visible and direct influence upon the daily work of life. The nearest approach to a taste for literature is a certain demand for instruction in history with a little flavour of contemporary politics. In short, the demand for instruction in literature is strictly moderate. That is what

men of experience tell me, and we have to recognise it, nor ought we to be at all surprised. Mr. Goschen, when he spoke some years ago, said there were three motives which might induce people to seek the higher education. First, to obtain greater knowledge for bread-winning purposes. From that point of view science would be most likely to feed the classes. Secondly, the improvement of one's knowledge of political economy, and history, and facts bearing upon the actual political work and life of the day. Thirdly, was the desire of knowledge as a luxury to brighten life and kindle thought. I am very much afraid that, in the ordinary temper of our people, and the ordinary mode of looking at life, the last of these motives savours a little of self-indulgence, and sentimentality, and other objectionable qualities. There is a great stir in the region of physical science at this moment, and it is likely, as any one may see, to take a chief and foremost place in the field of intellectual activity. After the severity with which science was for so many ages treated by literature, we cannot wonder that science now retaliates, now mightily exalts herself, and thrusts literature down intc

the lower place. I only have to say on the relative claims of science and literature what Dr. Arnold said:—"If one might wish for impossibilities, I might then wish that my children might be well versed in physical science, but in due subordination to the fulness and freshness of their knowledge on moral subjects. This, however, I believe cannot be; wherefore, rather than have it the principal thing in my son's mind, I would gladly have him think that the sun went round the earth, and that the stars were so many spangles set in the bright blue firmament" (Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, ii. 31). It is satisfactory that one may know something of these matters, and yet not believe that the sun goes round the earth. But if there is to be exclusion, I, for one, am not prepared to accept the rather enormous pretensions that are nowadays sometimes made for physical science as the be-all and end-all of education.

Next to this we know that there is a great stir on behalf of technical and commercial education. The special needs of our time and country compel us to pay a particular attention to this subject. Here knowledge is business, and we shall never

hold our industrial pre-eminence, with all that hangs upon that pre-eminence, unless we push on technical and commercial education with all our might. But there is a third kind of knowledge, and that too, in its own way, is business. There is the cultivation of the sympathies and imagination, the quickening of the moral sensibilities, and the enlargement of the moral vision. The great need in modern culture, which is scientific in method, rationalistic in spirit, and utilitarian in purpose, is to find some effective agency for cherishing within us the ideal. That is the business and function of literature. Literature alone will not make a good citizen; it will not make a good man. History affords too many proofs that scholarship and learning by no means purge men of acrimony, of vanity, of arrogance, of a murderous tenacity about trifles. Mere scholarship and learning and the knowledge of books do not by any means arrest and dissolve all the travelling acids of the human system. Nor would I pretend for a moment that literature can be any substitute for life and action. Burke said, "What is the education of the generality of the world? Reading a parcel of books? No!

Restraint and discipline, examples of virtue and of justice, these are what form the education of the world." That is profoundly true; it is life that is the great educator. But the parcel of books, if they are well chosen, reconcile us to this discipline; they interpret this virtue and justice; they awaken within us the diviner mind, and rouse us to a consciousness of what is best in others and ourselves.

As a matter of rude fact, there is much to make us question whether the spread of literature, as now understood, does awaken the diviner mind. The numbers of the books that are taken out from public libraries are not all that we could wish. I am not going to inflict many figures on you, but there is one set of these figures that distresses booklovers,—I mean the enormous place that fiction occupies in the books that are taken out. In one great town in the North prose fiction forms 76 per cent of all the books lent. In another great town prose fiction is 82 per cent; in a third 84 per cent; and in a fourth 67 per cent. I had the curiosity to see what happens in the libraries of the United States; and there—supposing the system of

cataloguing and enumeration to be the same—they are a trifle more serious in their taste than we are; where our average is about 70 per cent, at a place like Chicago it is only about 60 per cent. In Scotland, too, it ought to be said that they have a better average in respect to prose fiction. There is a larger demand for books called serious than in England. And I suspect, though I do not know, that one reason why there is in Scotland a greater demand for the more serious classes of literature than fiction, is that in the Scotch Universities there are what we have not in England—well-attended chairs of literature, systematically and methodically studied. Do not let it be supposed that I at all underrate the value of fiction. On the contrary, when a man has done a hard day's work, what can he do better than fall to and read the novels of Walter Scott, or the Brontës, or Mrs Gaskell, or some of our living writers. I am rather a voracious reader of fiction myself. I do not, therefore, point to it as a reproach or as a source of discouragement, that fiction takes so large a place in the objects of literary interest. I only suggest that it is much too large, and we should

be better pleased if it sank to about 40 per cent, and what is classified as general literature rose from 13 to 25 per cent.

There are other complaints of literature as an object of interest in this country. I was reading the other day an essay by the late head of my old college at Oxford, that very learned and remarkable man Mark Pattison, who was a booklover if ever there was one. He complained that the bookseller's bill in the ordinary English middle class family is shamefully small. It appeared to him to be monstrous that a man who is earning £1000 a year should spend less than £1 a week on books—that is to say, less than a shilling in the pound per annum. I know that Chancellors of the Exchequer take from us 8d. or 6d. in the pound, and I am not sure that they always use it as wisely as if they left us to spend it on books. Still, a shilling in the pound to be spent on books by a clerk who earns a couple of hundred pounds a year, or by a workman who earns a quarter of that sum, is rather more, I think, than can be reasonably expected. A man does not really need to have a great many books. Pattison said that nobody

who respected himself could have less than 1000 volumes. He pointed out that you can stack 1000 octavo volumes in a bookcase that shall be 13 feet by 10 feet, and 6 inches deep, and that everybody has that small amount of space at disposal. Still the point is not that men should have a great many books, but that they should have the right ones, and that they should use those that they have. We may all agree in lamenting that there are so many houses—even some of considerable social pretension—where you will not find a good atlas, a good dictionary, or a good cyclopædia of reference. What is still more lamentable, in a good many more houses where these books are, they are never referred to or opened. That is a very discreditable fact, because I defy anybody to take up a single copy of the *Times* newspaper and not come upon something in it, upon which, if their interest in the affairs of the day were active, intelligent, and alert as it ought to be, they would consult an atlas, dictionary, or cyclopædia of reference.

No sensible person can suppose for a single moment that everybody is born with the ability for using books, for reading and studying

literature. Certainly not everybody is born with the capacity of being a great scholar. All people are no more born great scholars like Gibbon and Bentley, than they are all born great musicians like Handel and Beethoven. What is much worse than that, many come into the world with the incapacity of reading, just as they come into it with the incapacity of distinguishing one tune from another. To them I have nothing to say. Even the morning paper is too much for them. They can only skim the surface even of that. I go further, and frankly admit that the habit and power of reading with reflection, comprehension, and memory all alert and awake, does not come at once to the natural man any more than many other sovereign virtues come to that interesting creature. What I do venture to press upon you is, that it requires no preterhuman force of will in any young man or woman—unless household circumstances are more than usually vexatious and unfavourable—to get at least half an hour out of a solid busy day for good and disinterested reading. Some will say that this is too much to expect, and the first persons to say it, I venture to predict, will be

those who waste their time most. At any rate, if I cannot get half an hour, I will be content with a quarter. Now, in half an hour I fancy you can read fifteen or twenty pages of Burke; or you can read one of Wordsworth's masterpieces—say the lines on Tintern; or say, one-third—if a scholar, in the original, and if not, in a translation—of a book of the Iliad or the Æneid. I do not think that I am filling the half-hour too full. But try for yourselves what you can read in half an hour. Then multiply the half-hour by 365, and consider what treasures you might have laid by at the end of the year; and what happiness, fortitude, and wisdom they would have given you during all the days of your life.

I will not take up your time by explaining the various mechanical contrivances and aids to successful study. They are not to be despised by those who would extract the most from books. Many people think of knowledge as of money. They would like knowledge, but cannot face the perseverance and self-denial that go to the acquisition of it. The wise student will do most of his reading with a pen or a pencil in his hand

He will not shrink from the useful toil of making abstracts and summaries of what he is reading. Sir William Hamilton was a strong advocate for underscoring books of study. "Intelligent underlining," he said, "gave a kind of abstract of an important work, and by the use of different coloured inks to mark a difference of contents, and discriminate the doctrinal from the historical or illustrative elements of an argument or exposition, the abstract became an analysis very serviceable for ready reference."[1] This assumes, as Hamilton said, that the book to be operated on is your own, and perhaps is rather too elaborate a counsel of perfection for most of us. Again, some great men—Gibbon was one, and Daniel Webster was another, and the great Lord Strafford was a third—always before reading a book made a short, rough analysis of the questions which they expected to be answered in it, the additions to be made to their knowledge, and whither it would take them.

"After glancing my eye," says Gibbon, "over the design and order of a new book, I suspended the perusal until I had finished the task of self-examination;

[1] Veitch's *Life of Hamilton*, pp. 314, 392.

till I had revolved in a solitary walk all that I knew or believed or had thought on the subject of the whole work or of some particular chapter: I was then qualified to discern how much the author added to my original stock; and if I was sometimes satisfied by the agreement, I was sometimes armed by the opposition, of our ideas."[1]

I have sometimes tried that way of steadying and guiding attention; and I commend it to you. I need not tell you that you will find that most books worth reading once are worth reading twice, and—what is most important of all—the masterpieces of literature are worth reading a thousand times. It is a great mistake to think that because you have read a masterpiece once or twice, or ten times, therefore you have done with it. Because it is a masterpiece, you ought to live with it, and make it part of your daily life. Another practice is that of keeping a common-place book, and transcribing into it what is striking and interesting and suggestive. And if you keep it wisely, as Locke has taught us, you will put every entry under a head, division, or subdivision.[2] This is an excellent

[1] Dr. Smith's *Gibbon*, i. 64.

[2] "If I would put anything in my Common-place Book, I find out a head to which I may refer it. Each

practice for concentrating your thought on the passage and making you alive to its real point and significance. Here, however, the high authority of Gibbon is against us. He refuses "strenuously to recommend." "The action of the pen," he says, "will doubtless imprint an idea on the mind as well as on the paper; but I much question whether the benefits of this laborious method are adequate to the waste of time; and I must agree with Dr. Johnson (*Idler*, No. 74) that 'what is twice read is commonly better remembered than what is transcribed.'"[1]

Various correspondents have asked me to say something about those lists of a hundred books that have been circulating through the world within the last few months. I have examined some of these lists with considerable care, and whatever else may be said of them—and I speak of them with deference and reserve, because men for whom one must have a great regard have

head ought to be some important and essential word to the matter in hand" (Locke's *Works*, iii. 308, ed. 1801). This is for indexing purposes, but it is worth while to go further and make a title for the passage extracted, indicating its pith and purport.

[1] Dr. Smith's *Gibbon*, i. 51.

compiled them—they do not seem to me to be calculated either to create or satisfy a wise taste for literature in any very worthy sense. To fill a man with a hundred parcels of heterogeneous scraps from the *Mahabharata*, and the *Sheking*, down to *Pickwick* and *White's Selborne*, may pass the time, but I cannot perceive how it would strengthen or instruct or delight. For instance, it is a mistake to think that every book that has a great name in the history of books or of thought is worth reading. Some of the most famous books are least worth reading. Their fame was due to their doing something that needed in their day to be done. The work done, the virtue of the book expires. Again, I agree with those who say that the steady working down one of these lists would end in the manufacture of that obnoxious product—the prig. A prig has been defined as an animal that is overfed for its size. I think that these bewildering miscellanies would lead to an immense quantity of that kind of overfeeding. The object of reading is not to dip into everything that even wise men have ever written. In the words of one of the most winning writers of English that ever existed—Cardinal Newman—

the object of literature in education is to open the mind, to correct it, to refine it, to enable it to comprehend and digest its knowledge, to give it power over its own faculties, application, flexibility, method, critical exactness, sagacity, address, and expression. These are the objects of that intellectual perfection which a literary education is destined to give. I will not venture on a list of a hundred books, but will recommend you instead to one book well worthy of your attention. Those who are curious as to what they should read in the region of pure literature will do well to peruse Mr. Frederic Harrison's admirable volume, called *The Choice of Books.* You will find there as much wise thought, eloquently and brilliantly put, as in any volume of its size and on its subject, whether it be in the list of a hundred or not.

Let me pass to another topic. We are often asked whether it is best to study subjects, or authors, or books. Well, I think that is like most of the stock questions with which the perverse ingenuity of mankind torments itself. There is no universal and exclusive answer. My own answer is a very plain one. It is sometimes

best to study books, sometimes authors, and sometimes subjects; but at all times it is best to study authors, subjects, and books in connection with one another. Whether you make your first approach from interest in an author or in a book, the fruit will be only half gathered if you leave off without new ideas and clearer lights both on the man and the matter. One of the noblest masterpieces in the literature of civil and political wisdom is to be found in Burke's three performances on the American war—his speech on Taxation in 1774, on Conciliation in 1775, and his letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol in 1777. I can only repeat to you what I have been saying in print and out of it for a good many years, and what I believe more firmly as observation is enlarged by time and occasion, that these three pieces are the most perfect manual in all literature for the study of great affairs, whether for the purpose of knowledge or action. "They are an example," as I have said before now, "an example without fault of all the qualities which the critic, whether a theorist or an actor, of great political situations should strive by night and by day to possess. If their subject were as remote as the quarrel

between the Corinthians and Corcyra, or the war between Rome and the Allies, instead of a conflict to which the world owes the opportunity of one of the most important of political experiments, we should still have everything to learn from the author's treatment; the vigorous grasp of masses of compressed detail, the wide illumination from great principles of human experience, the strong and masculine feeling for the two great political ends of Justice and Freedom, the large and generous interpretation of expediency, the morality, the vision, the noble temper." No student worthy of the name will lay aside these pieces, so admirable in their literary expression, so important for history, so rich in the lessons of civil wisdom, until he has found out something from other sources as to the circumstances from which such writings arose, and as to the man whose resplendent genius inspired them. There are great personalities like Burke who march through history with voices like a clarion trumpet and something like the glitter of swords in their hands. They are as interesting as their work. Contact with them warms and kindles the mind. You will not be content, after reading one of these

pieces, without knowing the character and personality of the man who conceived it, and until you have spent an hour or two—and an hour or two will go a long way with Burke still fresh in your mind—over other compositions in political literature, over Bacon's civil pieces, or Machiavelli's *Prince*, and others in the same order of thought.

This points to the right answer to another question that is constantly asked. We are constantly asked whether desultory reading is among things lawful and permitted. May we browse at large in a library, as Johnson said, or is it forbidden to open a book without a definite aim and fixed expectations? I am for a compromise. If a man has once got his general point of view, if he has striven with success to place himself at the centre, what follows is of less consequence. If he has got in his head a good map of the country, he may ramble at large with impunity. If he has once well and truly laid the foundations of a methodical, systematic habit of mind, what he reads will find its way to its proper place. If his intellect is in good order, he will find in every quarter something to assimilate and something that will nourish.

Next I am going to deal with another question, with which perhaps I ought to have started. What is literature? It has often been defined. Emerson says it is a record of the best thoughts. "By literature," says another author, "we mean the written thoughts and feelings of intelligent men and women arranged in a way that shall give pleasure to the reader." A third account is that "the aim of a student of literature is to know the best that has been thought in the world." Definitions always appear to me in these things to be in the nature of vanity. I feel that the attempt to be compact in the definition of literature ends in something that is rather meagre, partial, starved, and unsatisfactory. I turn to the answer given by a great French writer to a question not quite the same, viz. "What is a classic?" Literature consists of a whole body of classics in the true sense of the word, and a classic, as Sainte-Beuve defines him, is an "author who has enriched the human mind, who has really added to its treasure, who has got it to take a step further; who has discovered some unequivocal moral truth, or penetrated to some eternal passion, in that heart of man where

it seemed as though all were known and explored, who has produced his thought, or his observation, or his invention under some form, no matter what, so it be great, large, acute, and reasonable, sane and beautiful in itself; who has spoken to all in a style of his own, yet a style which finds itself the style of everybody,—in a style that is at once new and antique, and is the contemporary of all the ages." Another Frenchman, Doudan, who died in 1872, has an excellent passage on the same subject:—

"The man of letters properly so called is a rather singular being: he does not look at things exactly with his own eyes, he has not impressions of his own, we could not discover the imagination with which he started. 'Tis a tree on which have been grafted Homer, Virgil, Milton, Dante, Petrarch; hence have grown peculiar flowers which are not natural, and yet which are not artificial. Study has given to the man of letters something of the reverie of René; with Homer he has looked upon the plain of Troy, and there has remained in his brain some of the light of the Grecian sky; he has taken a little of the pensive lustre of Virgil, as he wanders by his side on the slopes of the Aventine; he sees the world as Milton saw it, through the grey mists of England, as Dante saw it, through the clear and glowing light of Italy. Of all these colours he composes for himself a colour that is unique and his own; from all these glasses by which his life passes on

its journey to the real world, there is formed a special tint, and that is what makes the imagination of men of letters."

At a single hearing you may not take all that in; but if you should have any opportunity of recurring to it, you will find this a satisfactory, full, and instructive account of what is a classic, and will find in it a full and satisfactory account of what those who have thought most on literature hope to get from it, and most would desire to confer upon others by it. Literature consists of all the books—and they are not so many—where moral truth and human passion are touched with a certain largeness, sanity, and attraction of form. My notion of the literary student is one who through books explores the strange voyages of man's moral reason, the impulses of the human heart, the chances and changes that have overtaken human ideals of virtue and happiness, of conduct and manners, and the shifting fortunes of great conceptions of truth and virtue. Poets, dramatists, humorists, satirists, masters of fiction, the great preachers, the character-writers, the maxim-writers, the great political orators—they are all literature in so far as they teach us to know man and to know human nature. This is

what makes literature, rightly sifted and selected and rightly studied, not the mere elegant trifling that it is so often and so erroneously supposed to be, but a proper instrument for a systematic training of the imagination and sympathies, and of a genial and varied moral sensibility.

From this point of view let me remind you that books are not the products of accident and caprice. As Goethe said, if you would understand an author, you must understand his age. The same thing is just as true of a book. If you would fully comprehend it, you must know the age. There is an order; there are causes and relations between great compositions and the societies in which they have emerged. Just as the naturalist strives to understand and to explain the distribution of plants and animals over the surface of the globe, to connect their presence or their absence with the great geological, climatic, and oceanic changes, so the student of literature, if he be wise, undertakes an ordered and connected survey of ideas, of tastes, of sentiments, of imagination, of humour, of invention, as they affect and as they are affected by the ever changing experiences of

human nature, and the manifold variations that time and circumstances are incessantly working in human society.

Those who are possessed, and desire to see others possessed, by that conception of literary study must watch with the greatest sympathy and admiration the efforts of those who are striving so hard, and, I hope, so successfully, to bring the systematic and methodical study of our own literature, in connection with other literatures, among subjects for teaching and examination in the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. I regard those efforts with the liveliest interest and sympathy. Everybody agrees that an educated man ought to have a general notion of the course of the great outward events of European history. So, too, an educated man ought to have a general notion of the course of all those inward thoughts and moods which find their expression in literature. I think that in cultivating the study of literature, as I have perhaps too laboriously endeavoured to define it, you will be cultivating the most important side of history. Knowledge of it gives stability and substance to

character. It furnishes a view of the ground we stand on. It builds up a solid backing of precedent and experience. It teaches us where we are. It protects us against imposture and surprise.

Before closing I should like to say one word upon the practice of composition. I have suffered, by the chance of life, many things from the practice of composition. It has been my lot, I suppose, to read more unpublished work than any one else in this room.

There is an idea, and, I venture to think, a very mistaken idea, that you cannot have a taste for literature unless you are yourself an author. I make bold entirely to demur to that proposition. It is practically most mischievous, and leads scores and even hundreds of people to waste their time in the most unprofitable manner that the wit of man can devise, on work in which they can no more achieve even the most moderate excellence than they can compose a Ninth Symphony or paint a Transfiguration. It is a terrible error to suppose that because one is happily able to relish "Wordsworth's solemn-thoughted idyll,

or Tennyson's enchanted reverie," therefore a solemn mission calls you to run off to write bad verse at the Lakes or the Isle of Wight. I beseech you not all to turn to authorship. I will even venture, with all respect to those who are teachers of literature, to doubt the excellence and utility of the practice of over-much essay-writing and composition. I have very little faith in rules of style, though I have an unbounded faith in the virtue of cultivating direct and precise expression. But you must carry on the operation inside the mind, and not merely by practising literary deportment on paper. It is not everybody who can command the mighty rhythm of the greatest masters of human speech. But every one can make reasonably sure that he knows what he means, and whether he has found the right word. These are internal operations, and are not forwarded by writing for writing's sake. Everybody must be urgent for attention to expression, if that attention be exercised in the right way. It has been said a million times that the foundation of right expression in speech or writing is sincerity. That is as true now as it has ever been. Right expression is a part of

character. As somebody has said, by learning to speak with precision, you learn to think with correctness; and the way to firm and vigorous speech lies through the cultivation of high and noble sentiments. So far as my observation has gone, men will do better if they seek precision by studying carefully and with an open mind and a vigilant eye the great models of writing, than by excessive practice of writing on their own account.

Much might here be said on what is one of the most important of all the sides of literary study. I mean its effect as helping to preserve the dignity and the purity of the English language. That noble instrument has never been exposed to such dangers as those which beset it to-day. Domestic slang, scientific slang, pseudo-æsthetic affectations, hideous importations from American newspapers, all bear down with horrible force upon the glorious fabric which the genius of our race has reared. I will say nothing of my own on this pressing theme, but will read to you a passage of weight and authority from the greatest master of mighty and beautiful speech.

"Whoever in a state," said Milton, "knows how wisely to form the manners of men and to rule them

at home and in war with excellent institutes, him in the first place, above others, I should esteem worthy of all honour. But next to him the man who strives to establish in maxims and rules the method and habit of speaking and writing received from a good age of the nation, and, as it were, to fortify the same round with a kind of wall, the daring to overleap which let a law only short of that of Romulus be used to prevent. . . . The one, as I believe, supplies noble courage and intrepid counsels against an enemy invading the territory. The other takes to himself the task of extirpating and defeating, by means of a learned detective police of ears, and a light band of good authors, that barbarism which makes large inroads upon the minds of men, and is a destructive intestine enemy of genius. Nor is it to be considered of small consequence what language, pure or corrupt, a people has, or what is their customary degree of propriety in speaking it. . . . For, let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly-yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility? On the other hand, we have never heard that any empire, any state, did not at least flourish in a middling degree as long as its own liking and care for its language lasted."[1]

The probabilities are that we are now coming to an epoch of a quieter style. There have been

[1] Letter to Bonmattei, from Florence, 1638.

in our generation three strong masters in the art of prose writing. There was, first of all, Carlyle, there was Macaulay, and there is Mr. Ruskin. These are all giants, and they have the rights of giants. But I do not believe that a greater misfortune can befall the students who attend classes here, than that they should strive to write like any one of these three illustrious men. I think it is the worst thing that can happen to them. They can never attain to the high mark which they have set before themselves. It is not everybody who can bend the bow of Ulysses, and most men only do themselves a mischief by trying to bend it. If we are now on our way to a quieter style, I am not sorry for it. Truth is quiet. Milton's phrase ever lingers in our minds as one of imperishable beauty—where he regrets that he is drawn by I know not what, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies. Moderation and judgment are, for most purposes, more than the flash and the glitter even of the genius. I hope that your professors of rhetoric will teach you to cultivate that golden art—the steadfast use of a language in which truth can be told; a

speech that is strong by natural force, and not merely effective by declamation; an utterance without trick, without affectation, without mannerisms, without any of that excessive ambition which overleaps itself as disastrously in prose writing as in so many other things.

I will detain you no longer. I hope that I have made it clear that we conceive the end of education on its literary side to be to make a man and not a cyclopædia, to make a citizen and not an album of elegant extracts. Literature does not end with knowledge of forms, with inventories of books and authors, with finding the key of rhythm, with the varying measure of the stanza, or the changes from the involved and sonorous periods of the seventeenth century down to the *staccato* of the nineteenth, or all the rest of the technicalities of scholarship. Do not think I contemn these. They are all good things to know, but they are not ends in themselves. The intelligent man, says Plato, will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and he will less value the others. Literature is one of the instruments, and one of the most powerful instruments, for

forming character, for giving us men and women armed with reason, braced by knowledge, clothed with steadfastness and courage, and inspired by that public spirit and public virtue of which it has been well said that they are the brightest ornaments of the mind of man. Bacon is right, as he generally is, when he bids us read not to contradict and refute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find talk and discourse, but to weigh and to consider. Yes, let us read to weigh and to consider. In the times before us that promise or threaten deep political, economical, and social controversy, what we need to do is to induce our people to weigh and consider. We want them to cultivate energy without impatience, activity without restlessness, inflexibility without ill-humour. I am not going to preach to you any artificial stoicism. I am not going to preach to you any indifference to money, or to the pleasures of social intercourse, or to the esteem and good-will of our neighbours, or to any other of the consolations and necessities of life. But, after all, the thing that matters most, both for happiness and for duty, is that we should strive habitually to live with wise thoughts and right

feelings. Literature helps us more than other studies to this most blessed companionship of wise thoughts and right feelings, and so I have taken this opportunity of earnestly commending it to your interest and care

VICTOR HUGO'S "NINETY-THREE."

"HISTORY has its truth, Legend has its truth. Legendary truth is of a different nature from historic truth. Legendary truth is invention with reality for result. For the rest, history and legend have the same aim—to paint under the man of a day eternal humanity." These words from his new and latest work (ii. 4) are a repetition of what Victor Hugo had already said in the introduction to his memorable *Legend of the Ages*. But the occasion of their application is far more delicate. Poetry lends itself naturally to the spacious, distant, vague, highly generalised way of present and real events. A prose romance, on the other hand, is of necessity abundant in details, in special circumstances, in particularities of time and place. This leaves all the more room for historic error, and historic

[1] The references are to the "Édition Définitive" in two volumes.

error in a work of imagination dealing with actual and known occurrences is obviously fatal, not only to legendary truth, but to legendary beauty and poetic impressiveness. And then the pitfalls which lie about the feet of the Frenchman who has to speak of 1793,—the terrible year of the modern epoch! The delirium of the Terror haunts most of the revolutionary historians, and the choicest examples in all literature of bombast, folly, emptiness, political immorality, inhumanity, formal repudiation of common sense and judgment, are to be found in the rhapsodies which men of letters, some of them men of eminence, call histories of the Revolution, or lives of this or that actor in it.

It was hardly a breach, therefore, of one's allegiance to Hugo's superb imaginative genius, if one had misgivings as to the result of an attempt, even in his strong hands, to combine legend with truth on a disastrous field, in which grave writers with academic solemnity had confounded truth with the falsest kind of legend. The theme was so likely to emphasise the defects incident to his mighty qualities; so likely to provoke an exaggeration of those mannerisms of thought no less than of phrase, which though

never ignoble nor paltry, yet now and then take something from the loftiness and sincerity of the writer's work. Wisdom, however, is justified of her children, and M. Hugo's genius has justified his choice of a difficult and perilous subject. *Quatrevingt-treize* is a monument of its author's finest gifts; and while those who are happily endowed with the capacity of taking delight in nobility and beauty of imaginative work will find themselves in possession of a new treasure, the lover of historic truth who hates to see abstractions passed off for actualities and legend erected in the place of fact escapes with his sensibilities almost unwounded.

The historic interlude at the beginning of the second volume is undoubtedly open to criticism from the political student's point of view. As a sketch of the Convention, the scene of its sittings, the stormful dramas that were enacted there one after another for month after month, the singular men who one after another rode triumphant upon the whirlwind for a little space, and were then mercilessly in an instant swept into outer darkness, the commoner men who cowered before the fury of the storm, and were like "smoke driven hither and thither by the

wind," and laboured hard upon a thousand schemes for human improvement, some admirable, others mere frenzy, while mobs filed in and danced mad carmagnoles before them—all this is a magnificent masterpiece of accurate, full, and vivid description. To the philosophy of it we venture to demur. The mystic, supernatural view of the French Revolution, which is so popular among French writers who object to the supernatural and the mystical everywhere else, is to us a thing most incredible, most puerile, most mischievous. People talk of '93, as a Greek tragedian treats the Tale of Troy divine, or the terrible fortunes of the house of Atreus, as the result of dark invincible fate, as the unalterable decree of the immortal gods. Even Victor Hugo's strong spirit does not quite overcome the demoralising doctrine of a certain revolutionary school, though he has the poet's excuse. Thus, of the Convention:—

"Minds all a prey to the wind. But this wind was a wind of miracle and portent. To be a member of the Convention was to be a wave of the ocean. And this was true of its greatest. The force of impulsion came from on high. There was in the Convention a will, which was the will of all, and yet was the will of no

one. It was an idea, an idea resistless and without measure, which breathed in the shadow from the high heavens. We call that the Revolution. As this idea passed, it threw down one and raised up another; it bore away this man in the foam, and broke that man to pieces upon the rocks. The idea knew whither it went, and drove the gulf of waters before it. To impute the Revolution to men is as one who should impute the tide to the waves. The revolution is an action of the Unknown. . . . It is a form of the abiding phenomenon that shuts us in on every side and that we call Necessity. . . . In presence of these climacteric catastrophes which waste and vivify civilisation, one is slow to judge detail. To blame or praise men on account of the result, is as if one should blame or praise the figures on account of the total. That which must pass passes, the storm that must rage rages. The eternal serenity does not suffer from these boisterous winds. Above revolutions truth and justice abide, as the starry heaven abides above the tempests" (i. 188-189).

As a lyric passage, full of the breath of inspiration; as history, superficial and untrue; as morality, enervating and antinomian. The author is assuredly far nearer the mark in another place when he speaks of "*that immense improvisation* which is the French Revolution" (ii. 35)—an improvisation of which every step can be rationally explained.

After all, this is no more than an interlude.

Victor Hugo only surveys the events of '93 as a field for the growth of types of character. His instinct as an artist takes him away from the Paris of '93, where the confusion, uproar, human frenzy, leave him no background of nature, with nature's fixity, sternness, indifference, sublimity. This he found in La Vendée, whose vast forests grow under the pencil of this master of all the more terrible and majestic effects, into a picture hardly less sombre and mighty in its impressiveness than the memorable ocean pieces of the *Toilers of the Sea*. If the waves are appalling in their agitation, their thunders, their sterility, the forest is appalling in its silence, its dimness, its rest, and the invisibleness of the thousand kinds of life to which it gives a shelter. If the violence and calm and mercilessness of the sea penetrated the romance of eight years ago with transcendent fury, so does the stranger, more mysterious, and in a sense even the more inhuman life of the forest penetrate the romance of to-day. From the opening chapter down to the very close, even while the interlude takes us for a little while to the Paris café where Danton, Robespierre, and Marat sit in angry counsel, even while we are on

the sea with the royalist Marquis and Halmalo, the reader is subtly haunted by the great Vendean woods, their profundity, their mystery, their tragic and sinister beauties.

"The forest is barbarous.

"The configuration of the land counsels man in many an act. More than we suppose, it is his accomplice. In the presence of certain savage landscapes, you are tempted to exonerate man and blame creation; you feel a silent challenge and incitement from nature; the desert is constantly unwholesome for conscience, especially for a conscience without light. Conscience may be a giant; that makes a Socrates or a Jesus: it may be a dwarf; that makes an Atreus or a Judas. The puny conscience soon turns reptile; the twilight thickets, the brambles, the thorns, the marsh waters under branches, make for it a fatal haunting place; amid all this it undergoes the mysterious infiltration of ill suggestions. The optical illusions, the unexplained images, the scaring hour, the scaring spot, all throw man into that kind of affright, half-religious, half-brutal, which in ordinary times engenders superstition, and in epochs of violence, savagery. Hallucinations hold the torch that lights the path to murder. There is something like vertigo in the brigand. Nature with her prodigies has a double effect; she dazzles great minds, and blinds the duller soul. When man is ignorant, when the desert offers visions, the obscurity of the solitude is added to the obscurity of the intelligence; thence in man comes the opening of abysses. Certain rocks, certain ravines, certain thickets, certain wild openings of the evening

sky through the trees, drive man towards mad or monstrous exploits. We might almost call some places criminal" (ii. 21).

With La Vendée for background, and some savage incidents of the bloody Vendean war for external machinery, Victor Hugo has realised his conception of '93 in three types of character: Lantenac, the royalist marquis; Cimourdain, the puritan turned Jacobin; and Gauvain, for whom one can as yet find no short name, he belonging to the millenarian times. Lantenac, though naturally a less original creation than the other two, is still an extremely bold and striking figure, drawn with marked firmness of hand, and presenting a thoroughly distinct and coherent conception. It is a triumph of the poetic or artistic part of the author's nature over the merely political part, that he should have made even his type of the old feudal order which he execrates so bitterly, a heroic, if ever so little also a diabolic, personage. There is everything that is cruel, merciless, unflinching, in Lantenac; there is nothing that is mean or insignificant. A gunner at sea, by inattention to the lashing of his gun, causes an accident which breaks the ship

to pieces, and then he saves the lives of the crew by hazarding his own life to secure the wandering monster. Lantenac decorates him with the cross of Saint Lewis for his gallantry, and instantly afterwards has him shot for his carelessness. He burns homesteads and villages, fusillades men and women, and makes the war a war without quarter or grace. Yet he is no swashbuckler of the melodramatic stage. There is a fine reserve, a brief gravity, in the delineation of him, his clear will, his quickness, his intrepidity, his relentlessness, which make of him the incarnation of aristocratic coldness, hatred, and pride. You might guillotine Lantenac with exquisite satisfaction, and yet he does not make us ashamed of mankind. Into his mouth, as he walks about his dungeon, impatiently waiting to be led out to execution, Victor Hugo has put the aristocratic view of the Revolution. Some portions of it (ii. 224-226) would fit amazingly well into M. Renan's notions about the moral and intellectual reform of France.

If the Breton aristocrat of '93 was fearless, intrepid, and without mercy in defence of God and the King—and his qualities were all shared,

the democrat may love to remember, by the Breton peasant, whether peasant follower or peasant leader—the Jacobin was just as vigorous, as intrepid, as merciless in defence of his Republic. "Pays, Patrie," says Victor Hugo, in words which perhaps will serve to describe many a future passage in French history, "ces deux mots résument toute la guerre de Vendée; querelle de l'idée locale contre l'idée universelle; paysans contre patriotes" (ii. 22).[1] Certainly the Jacobins were the patriots of that era, the deliverers of France from something like that process of partition which further east was consummated in this very '93. We do not mean the handful of odious miscreants who played fool and demon in turns in the insurrectionary Commune and elsewhere: such men as Collot d'Herbois, or Carrier, or Panis. The normal Jacobin was a remarkable type. He has been excellently described by Louis Blanc as something powerful, original, sombre; half agitator and half statesman; half puritan and half monk

[1] In corroboration of this view of the Vendean rising as democratic, see Mortimer-Ternaux, *Hist. de la Terreur*, vol. vi. bk. 30.

half inquisitor and half tribune. These words of the historian are the exact prose version of the figure of Cimourdain, the typical Jacobin of the poet. "Cimourdain was a pure conscience, but sombre. He had in him the absolute. He had been a priest, and that is a serious thing. Man, like the sky, may have a dark serenity; it is enough that something should have brought night into his soul. Priesthood had brought night into Cimourdain. He who has been a priest is one still. What brings night upon us may leave the stars with us. Cimourdain was full of virtues, full of truths, but they shone in the midst of darkness" (i. 123). If the aristocrat had rigidity, so had the Jacobin. "Cimourdain had the blind certitude of the arrow, which only sees the mark and makes for it. In revolution, nothing so formidable as the straight line. Cimourdain strode forward with fatality in his step. He believed that in social genesis the very extreme point must always be solid ground, an error peculiar to minds that for reason substitute logic" (i. 127). And so forth, until the character of the Jacobin lives for us with a precision, a fulness, a naturalness, such as neither Carlyle

nor Michelet nor Quinet has been able to clothe it with, though these too have the sacred illumination of genius. Victor Hugo's Jacobin is a poetic creation, yet the creation only lies in the vivid completeness with which the imagination of a great master has realised to itself the traits and life of an actual personality. It is not that he has any special love for his Jacobin, but that he has the poet's eye for types, politics apart. He sees how much the aristocrat, slaying hip and thigh for the King, and the Jacobin, slaying hip and thigh for the Republic, resembled one another. "Let us confess," he says, "these two men, the Marquis and the priest [Lantenac and Cimourdain], were up to a certain point the self-same man. The bronze mask of civil war has two profiles, one turned towards the past, the other towards the future, but as tragic the one as the other. Lantenac was the first of these profiles, Cimourdain was the second; only the bitter rictus of Lantenac was covered with shadow and night, and on the fatal brow of Cimourdain was a gleaming of the dawn" (ii. 91).

And let us mark Victor Hugo's signal distinc-

tion in his analysis of character. It is not mere vigour of drawing, nor acuteness of perception, nor fire of imagination, though he has all these gifts in a singular degree, and truest of their kind. But then Scott had them too, and yet we feel in Victor Hugo's work a seriousness, a significance, a depth of tone, which never touches us in the work of his famous predecessor in romance, delightful as the best of that work is. Balfour of Burley is one of Scott's most commanding figures, and the stern Covenanter is nearly in the same plane of character as the stern heroic Jacobin. Yet Cimourdain impresses us more profoundly. He is as natural, as human, as readily conceivable, and yet he produces something of the subtle depth of effect which belongs to the actor in a play of Æschylus. Why is this? Because Hugo makes us conscious of that tragedy of temperament, that sterner Necessity of character, that resistless compulsion of circumstance, which is the modern and positive expression for the old Destiny of the Greeks, and which in some expression or other is now an essential element in the highest presentation of human life. Here is not the Unknown. On the contrary, we are

in the very heart of science; tragedy to the modern is not τύχη, but a thing of cause and effect, invariable antecedent and invariable consequent. It is the presence of this tragic force underlying action that gives to all Hugo's work its lofty quality, its breadth, and generality, and fills both it, and us who read, with pity and gravity and an understanding awe.

The action is this. Cimourdain had the young Gauvain to train from his earliest childhood, and the pupil grew up with the same rigid sense of duty as the master, though temperament modified its form. When the Revolution came, Gauvain, though a noble, took sides with the people, but he was not of the same spirit as his teacher. "The Revolution," says Victor Hugo, "by the side of youthful figures of giants, such as Danton, Saint-Just, and Robespierre, has young ideal figures, like Hoche and Marceau. Gauvain was one of these figures" (ii. 34). Cimourdain has himself named delegate from the Committee of Public Safety to the expeditionary column of which Gauvain is in command. The warmth of affection between them was undiminished, but difference in temperament bred difference in their

principles. They represented, as the author says, with the candour of the poet, the two poles of the truth; the two sides of the inarticulate, subterranean, fatal contention of the year of the Terror. Their arguments with one another make the situation more intelligible to the historic student, as they make the characters of the speakers more transparent for the purposes of the romance.

This is Cimourdain:—

"Beware, there are terrible duties in life. Do not accuse what is not responsible. Since when has the disorder been the fault of the physician? Yes, what marks this tremendous year is being without pity. Why? Because it is the great revolutionary year. This year incarnates the revolution. The revolution has an enemy, the old world, and to that it is pitiless, just as the surgeon has an enemy, gangrene, and is pitiless to that. The revolution extirpates kingship in the king, aristocracy in the noble, despotism in the soldier, superstition in the priest, barbarity in the judge, in a word whatever is tyranny in whatever is tyrant. The operation is frightful, the revolution performs it with a sure hand. As to the quantity of sound flesh that it requires, ask Boerhave what he thinks of it. What tumour that has to be cut out does not involve loss of blood? . . . The revolution devotes itself to its fated task. It mutilates but it saves. . . . It has the past in its grasp, it will not spare. It makes in

civilisation a deep incision whence shall come the safety of the human race. You suffer? No doubt. How long will it last? The time needed for the operation. Then you will live," etc. (ii. 65-66).

"One day," he adds, "the Revolution will justify the Terror." To which Gauvain retorts thus:—

"Fear lest the Terror be the calumny of the Revolution. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, are dogmas of peace and harmony. Why give them an aspect of alarm? What do we seek? To win nations to the universal public. Then why inspire fright? Of what avail is intimidation? It is wrong to do ill in order to do good. You do not pull down the throne to leave the scaffold standing. Let us hurl away crowns, let us spare heads. The revolution is concord, not affright. Mild ideas are ill-served by men who do not know pity. Amnesty is for me the noblest word in human speech. I will shed no blood save at hazard of my own. . . . In the fight let us be the enemies of our foes, and after the victory their brothers" (ii. 67).

These two together, Cimourdain and Gauvain, make an ideal pair of the revolutionists of '93. Strip each of them of the beauty of character with which the poet's imagination has endowed them, add instead passion, violence, envy, egoism, malice; then you understand how in the very face of the foreign enemy Girondins sharpened

the knife for the men of the Mountain, Hébertists screamed for the lives of Robespierrists, Robespierre struck off the head of Danton, Thermidorians crushed Robespierre.

Victor Hugo has given to this typic historical struggle of '93 the qualities of nobleness and beauty which art requires in dealing with real themes. Lantenac falls into the hands of the Blues, headed by Cimourdain and Gauvain, but he does so in consequence of yielding to a heroic and self-devoting impulse of humanity. Cimourdain, true to his temperament, insists on his instant execution. Gauvain, true also to his temperament, is seized with a thousand misgivings, and there is no more ample, original, and masterly presentation of a case of conscience, that in civil war is always common enough, than the struggle through which Gauvain passes before he can resolve to deliver Lantenac. This pathetic debate—"the stone of Sisyphus, which is only the quarrel of man with himself"—turns on the loftiest, broadest, most generous motives, touching the very bases of character, and reaching far beyond the issue of '93. The political question is seen to be no more than a superficial

aspect of the deeper moral question. Lantenac, the representative of the old order, had performed an exploit of signal devotion. Was it not well that one who had faith in the new order should show himself equally willing to cast away his life to save one whom self-sacrifice had transformed from the infernal Satan into the heavenly Lucifer?

"Gauvain saw in the shade the sinister smile of the sphinx. The situation was a sort of dread crossway where the conflicting truths issued and confronted one another, and where the three supreme ideas of man stood face to face—humanity, the family, the fatherland. Each of the voices spoke in turn, and each in turn declared the truth. How choose? Each in turn seemed to hit the mark of reason and justice, and said, Do that. Was that the thing to be done? Yes. No. Reasoning counselled one thing; sentiment another; the two counsels were contradictory. Reasoning is only reason; sentiment is often conscience; the one comes from man, the other from a loftier source. That is why sentiment has less distinctness, and more might. Yet what strength in the severity of reason! Gauvain hesitated. His perplexity was so fierce. Two abysses opened before him: to destroy the marquis, or to save him. Which of these two gulfs was duty?"

The whole scene (ii. 206-219) is a masterpiece of dramatic strength, sustention, and flexibility—only equalled by the dramatic vivacity

of the scene in which Cimourdain, sitting as judge, orders the prisoner to be brought forward, to his horror sees Gauvain instead of Lantenac, and then proceeds to condemn the man whom he loves best on earth to be taken to the guillotine.

The tragedy of the story, its sombre tone, the overhanging presence of death in it, are prevented from being oppressive to us by the variety of minor situation and subordinate character with which the writer has surrounded the central figures. No writer living is so consummate a master of landscape, and besides the forest we here have an elaborate sea-piece, full of the weird, ineffable, menacing suggestion of the sea in some of her unnumbered moods; and there is a scene of late twilight on a high solitary down over the bay of Mont Saint-Michel, to which a reader blessed with sensibility to the subtler impressions of landscape will turn again and again, as one visits again and again some actual prospect where the eye procures for the inner sense a dream of beauty and the incommensurable. Perhaps the palm for exquisite workmanship will be popularly given, and justly given, to

the episode humorously headed *The Massacre of Saint Bartholomew*, at the opening of the third volume. It is the story of three little children, barely out of infancy, awaking, playing, eating, wondering, slumbering, in solitude through a summer day in an old tower. As a rule the attempt to make infancy interesting in literature ends in maudlin failure. But at length the painters have found an equal, or more than an equal, in an artist whose medium lends itself less easily than colour and form to the reproduction of the beauty and life of childhood. In his poetry Victor Hugo had already shown his passing sensibility to the pathos of the beginnings of our life; witness such pieces as *Chose vue un Jour de Printemps, Les Pauvres Gens*, the well-known pieces in *L'Année Terrible*, and a hundred other lively touches and fragments of finished loveliness and penetrating sympathy. In prose it is a more difficult feat to collect the trivial details which make up the life of the tiny human animal into a whole that shall be impressive, finished, and beautiful. And prose can only describe by details enumerated one by one. This most arduous feat is accomplished in the

children's summer day in the tower, and with enchanting success. Intensely realistic, yet the picture overflows with emotion—not the emotion of the mother, but of the poet. There is infinite tenderness, pathos, love, but all heightened at once and strengthened by the self-control of masculine force. A man writing about little ones seems able to place himself outside, and thus to gain more calmness and freedom of vision than the more passionate interest or yearning of women permits to them in this field of art. Not a detail is spared, yet the whole is full of delight and pity and humour. Only one lyric passage is allowed to poetise and accentuate the realism of the description. Georgette, some twenty months old, scrambles from her cradle and prattles to the sunbeam.

"What a bird says in its song, a child says in its prattle. 'Tis the same hymn; a hymn indistinct, lisping, profound. The child has what the bird has not, the sombre human destiny in front of it. Hence the sadness of men as they listen, mingling with the joy of the little one as it sings. The sublimest canticle to be heard on earth is the stammering of the human soul on the lips of infancy. That confused chirruping of a thought, that is as yet no more than an instinct,

has in it one knows not what sort of artless appeal to the eternal justice; or is it a protest uttered on the threshold before entering in, a protest meek and poignant? This ignorance smiling at the Infinite compromises all creation in the lot that shall fall to the weak defenceless being. Ill, if it shall come, will be an abuse of confidence.

"The child's murmuring is more and is less than words; there are no notes, and yet it is a song; there are no syllables, and yet it is a language. . . . This poor stammering is a compound of what the child said when it was an angel, and of what it will say when it becomes a man. The cradle has a Yesterday as the grave has a Morrow; the Morrow and the Yesterday mingle in that strange cooing their twofold mystery. . . ."

"Her lips smiled, her eyes smiled, the dimples in her cheeks smiled. There came forth in this smile a mysterious welcome of the morning. The soul has faith in the ray. The heavens were blue, warm was the air. The fragile creature, without knowing anything, or recognising anything, or understanding anything, softly floating in musings which are not thought, felt itself in safety in the midst of nature, among those good trees and that guileless greenery, in the pure and peaceful landscape, amid the rustle of nests, of flowing springs, of insects, of leaves, while over all there glowed the great innocency of the sun" (ii. 104).

As an eminent man has recently written about Wordsworth's most famous Ode, there may be

some bad philosophy here, but there is assuredly some noble and touching poetry.

If the carelessness of infancy is caught with this perfection of finish, there is a tragic companion piece in the horror and gnawing anguish of the wretched woman from whom her young have been taken—her rescue from death, her fierce yearnings for them like the yearnings of a beast, her brute-like heedlessness of her life and her body in the cruel search.

And so the poet conducts us along the strange excursive windings of the life and passion of humanity. The same hand which draws such noble figures as Gauvain—and the real Lanjuinais of history was fully as heroic and as noble as the imaginary Gauvain of fiction—is equally skilful in drawing the wild Breton beggar who dwells underground among the branching tree-roots; and the monstrous Imânus, the barbarous retainer of the Lord of the Seven Forests; and Radoub, the serjeant from Paris, a man of hearty oaths, hideous, heroic, humoursome, of a bloody ingenuity in combat. And the same hand which described the silent sundown on the sandy shore of the

bay, and the mysterious darkness of the forests, and the blameless play of the little ones, gives us the prodigious animation of the night surprise at Dôl, the furious conflict at La Tourgue, and, perhaps most powerful of all, the breaking loose of the gun on the deck of the *Claymore*. You may say that this is only melodrama; but if we turn to the actual events of '93, the melodrama of the romancer will seem tame compared with the melodrama of the faithful chronicler. And so long as the narrative of melodramatic action is filled with poetry and beauty, there is no reproach in uncommon situation, in intense passion, in magnanimous or subtle motives that are not of every day. Of Hugo's art we may say what Dr. Newman has said of something else: *Such work is always open to criticism and it is always above it.*

There is poetry and beauty, no doubt, in the common lives about us, if we look at them with imaginative and sympathetic eye, and we owe much to the art that reveals to us the tragedy of the parlour and the frockcoat, and analyses the bitterness and sorrow and high passion that may underlie a life of outer smoothness and decorum.

Still, criticism cannot accept this as the final and exclusive limitation of imaginative work. Art is nothing if not catholic and many-sided, and it is certainly not exhausted by mere domestic possibilities. Goethe's fine and luminous feeling for practical life, which has given such depth of richness and wisdom to his best prose writing, fills us with a delightful sense of satisfaction and adequateness; and yet why should it not leave us with a mind eagerly open for the larger and more inventive romance, in which nature is clothed with some of that awe and might and silent contemplation of the puny destinies of man, that used to surround the conception of the supernatural? Victor Hugo seeks strong and extraordinary effects; he is a master of terrible image, profound emotion, audacious fancy; but then these are as real, as natural, as true to fact, as the fairest reproduction of the moral poverties and meannesses of the world. And let it be added that while he is without a rival in the dark mysterious heights of imaginative effect, he is equally a master in strokes of tenderness and the most delicate human sympathy. His last book seems to contain pieces that surpass every

other book of Hugo's in the latter range of qualities, and not to fall at all short in the former. And so, in the words of the man of genius who last wrote on Victor Hugo in these pages,[1] "As we pity ourselves for the loss of poems and pictures which have perished, and left of Sappho but a fragment and of Zeuxis but a name, so are we inclined to pity the dead who died too soon to enjoy the great works we have enjoyed. At each new glory that 'swims into our ken,' we surely feel that it is something to have lived to see that too rise."

[1] Mr. Swinburne.

ON "THE RING AND THE BOOK."

WHEN the first volume of Mr. Browning's new poem came before the critical tribunals, public and private, recognised or irresponsible, there was much lamentation even in quarters where a manlier humour might have been expected, over the poet's choice of a subject. With facile largeness of censure, it was pronounced a murky subject, sordid, unlovely, morally sterile, an ugly leaf out of some ancient Italian Newgate Calendar. One hinted in vain that wisdom is justified of her children, that the poet must be trusted to judge of the capacity of his own theme, and that it is his conception and treatment of it that ultimately justify or discredit his choice. Now that the entire work is before the world, this is plain, and it is admitted. When the second volume, containing *Giuseppe Caponsacchi*,

appeared, men no longer found it sordid or ugly; the third, with *Pompilia*, convinced them that the subject was not, after all, so incurably unlovely; and the fourth, with *The Pope*, and the passage from the Friar's sermon, may well persuade those who needed persuasion, that moral fruitfulness depends on the master, his eye and hand, his vision and grasp, more than on this and that in the transaction which has taken possession of his imagination.

The truth is, we have for long been so debilitated by pastorals, by graceful presentation of the Arthurian legend for drawing-rooms, by idylls, not robust and Theocritean, by verse directly didactic, that a rude blast of air from the outside welter of human realities is apt to give a shock, that might well show in what simpleton's paradise we have been living. The ethics of the rectory parlour set to sweet music, the respectable aspirations of the sentimental curate married to exquisite verse, the everlasting glorification of domestic sentiment in blameless princes and others, as if that were the poet's single province and the divinely-appointed end of all art, as if domestic sentiment included

and summed up the whole throng of passions, emotions, strife, and desire; all this might seem to be making valetudinarians of us all. Our public is beginning to measure the right and possible in art by the superficial probabilities of life and manners within a ten-mile radius of Charing Cross. Is it likely, asks the critic, that Duke Silva would have done this, that Fedalma would have done that? Who shall suppose it possible that Caponsacchi acted thus, that Count Guido was possessed by devils so? The poser is triumphant, because the critic is tacitly appealing to the normal standard of probabilities in our own day. In the tragedy of Pompilia we are taken far from the serene and homely region in which some of our teachers would fain have it that the whole moral universe can be snugly pent up. We see the black passions of man at their blackest; hate, so fierce, undiluted, implacable, passionate, as to be hard of conception by our simpler northern natures; cruelty, so vindictive, subtle, persistent, deadly, as to fill us with a pain almost too great for true art to produce; greediness, lust, craft, penetrating a

whole stock and breed, even down to the ancient mother of "that fell house of hate,"–

"The gaunt grey nightmare in the furthest smoke,
The hag that gave these three abortions birth,
Unmotherly mother and unwomanly
Woman, that near turns motherhood to shame,
Womanliness to loathing: no one word,
No gesture to curb cruelty a whit
More than the she-pard thwarts her playsome whelps
Trying their milk-teeth on the soft o' the throat
O' the first fawn, flung, with those beseeching eyes,
Flat in the covert! How should she but couch,
Lick the dry lips, unsheathe the blunted claw,
Catch 'twixt her placid eyewinks at what chance
Old bloody half-forgotten dream may flit,
Born when herself was novice to the taste,
The while she lets youth take its pleasure" (iv. 40).

But, then, if the poet has lighted up for us these grim and appalling depths, he has not failed to raise us too into the presence of proportionate loftiness and purity.

"Tantum vertice in auras
Aetherias quantum radice in Tartara tendit."

Like the gloomy and umbrageous grove of which the Sibyl spake to the pious Æneas, the poem conceals a golden branch and golden leaves. In the second volume, Guido, servile and false, is followed by Caponsacchi, as noble

alike in conception and execution as anything that Mr. Browning has ever achieved. In the third volume, the austere pathos of Pompilia's tale relieves the too oppressive jollity of Don Giacinto, and the flowery rhetoric of Bottini; while in the fourth, the deep wisdom, justice, and righteous mind of the Pope, reconcile us to endure the sulphurous whiff from the pit in the confession of Guido, now desperate, naked, and satanic. From what at first was sheer murk, there comes out a long procession of human figures, infinitely various in form and thought, in character and act; a group of men and women, eager, passionate, indifferent; tender and ravenous, mean and noble, humorous and profound, jovial with prosperity or half-dumb with misery, skirting the central tragedy, or plunged deep into the thick of it, passers-by who put themselves off with a glance at the surface of a thing, and another or two who dive to the heart of it. And they all come out with a certain Shakespearian fulness, vividness, directness. Above all, they are every one of them men and women, with free play of human life in limb and feature, as in an antique

sculpture. So much of modern art, in poetry as in painting, runs to mere drapery. "I grant," said Lessing, "that there is also a beauty in drapery, but can it be compared with that of the human form? And shall he who can attain to the greater, rest content with the less? I much fear that the most perfect master in drapery shows by that very talent wherein his weakness lies." This was spoken of plastic art, but it has a yet deeper meaning in poetic criticism. There too, the master is he who presents the natural shape, the curves, the thews of men, and does not labour and seek praise for faithful reproduction of the mere moral drapery of the hour, this or another; who gives you Hercules at strife with Antæus, Laocoon writhing in the coils of the divine serpents, the wrestle with circumstance or passion, with outward destiny or inner character, in the free outlines of nature and reality. The capacity which it possesses for this presentation, at once so varied and so direct, is one reason why the dramatic form ranks as the highest expression and measure of the creative power of the poet; and the extra-

ordinary grasp with which Mr. Browning has availed himself of this double capacity is one reason why we should reckon *The Ring and the Book* as one of his masterpieces.

We may say this, and still not be blind to the faults of the poem. Many persons agree that they find it too long, and if they find it so, then for them it is too long. Others, who cannot resist the critic's temptation of believing that a remark must be true if it only look acute and specific, vow that the disclosure in the first volume of the whole plan and plot vitiates subsequent artistic merit. If one cannot enjoy what comes, for knowing beforehand what is coming, this objection may be allowed to have a root in human nature; but then two things might perhaps be urged on the other side,—first, that the interest of the poem lies in the development and presentation of character, on the one hand, and in the many sides which a single transaction offered to as many minds, on the other; and therefore that this true interest could not be marred by the bare statement what the transaction was or, baldly looked at, seemed to be; and, second, that the poem was meant to find

its reader in a mood of mental repose, ready to receive the poet's impressions, undisturbed by any agitating curiosity as to plot or final outcome. A more valid accusation touches the many verbal perversities, in which a poet has less right than another to indulge. The compound Latin and English of Don Giacinto, notwithstanding the fun of the piece, still grows a burden to the flesh. Then there are harsh and formless lines, bursts of metrical chaos, from which a writer's dignity and self-respect ought surely to be enough to preserve him Again, there are passages marked by a coarse violence of expression that is nothing short of barbarous (for instance, ii. 190, or 245). The only thing to be said is, that the countrymen of Shakespeare have had to learn to forgive uncouth outrages on form and beauty to fine creative genius. If only one could be sure that readers, unschooled as too many are to love the simple and elevated beauty of such form as Sophocles or as Corneille gives, would not think the worst fault the chief virtue, and confound the poet's bluntnesses with his admirable originality. It is certain that in Shake-

speare s case his defects are constantly fastened upon, by critics who have never seriously studied the forms of dramatic art except in the literature of England, and extolled as instances of his characteristic mightiness. It may well be, therefore, that the grotesque caprices which Mr. Browning unfortunately permits to himself may find misguided admirers, or, what is worse, even imitators. It would be most unjust, however, while making due mention of these things, to pass over the dignity and splendour of the verse in many places, where the intensity of the writer's mood finds worthy embodiment in a sustained gravity and vigour and finish of diction not to be surpassed. The concluding lines of the *Caponsacchi* (comprising the last page of the second volume), the appeal of the Greek poet in *The Pope*, one or two passages in the first *Guido* (*e.g.* vol. ii., p. 156, from line 1957), and the close of the *Pompilia*, ought to be referred to when one wishes to know what power over the instrument of his art Mr. Browning might have achieved, if he had chosen to discipline himself in instrumentation.

When all is said that can be said about the

violences which from time to time invade the poem, it remains true that the complete work affects the reader most powerfully with that wide unity of impression which it is the highest aim of dramatic art, and perhaps of all art, to produce. After we have listened to all the whimsical dogmatising about beauty, to all the odious cant about morbid anatomy, to all the well-deserved reproach for unpardonable perversities of phrase and outrages on rhythm, there is left to us the consciousness that a striking human transaction has been seized by a vigorous and profound imagination, that its many diverse threads have been wrought into a single, rich, and many-coloured web of art, in which we may see traced for us the labyrinths of passion and indifference, stupidity and craft, prejudice and chance, along which truth and justice have to find a devious and doubtful way. The transaction itself, lurid and fuliginous, is secondary to the manner of its handling and presentment. We do not derive our sense of unity from the singleness and completeness of the horrid tragedy, so much as from the power with which its own circumstances as they happened, the rumours which

clustered about it from the minds of men without, the many moods, fancies, dispositions, which it for the moment brought out into light, playing round the fact, the half-sportive flights with which lawyers, judges, quidnuncs of the street, darted at conviction and snatched hap-hazard at truth, are all wrought together into one self-sufficient and compacted shape.

But this shape is not beautiful, and the end of art is beauty? Verbal fanaticism is always perplexing, and, rubbing my eyes, I ask whether that beauty means anything more than such an arrangement and disposition of the parts of the work as, first kindling a great variety of dispersed emotions and thoughts in the mind of the spectator, finally concentrates them in a single mood of joyous, sad, meditative, or interested delight. The sculptor, the painter, and the musician, have each their special means of producing this final and superlative impression; each is bound by the strictly limited capability in one direction and another of the medium in which he works. In poetry it is because they do not perceive how much more manifold and varied are the means of reaching the end than in the other expressions of

art, that people insist each upon some particular quiddity which, entering into composition, alone constitutes it genuinely poetic, beautiful, or artistic. Pressing for definition, you never get much further than that each given quiddity means a certain Whatness. This is why poetical criticism is usually so little catholic. A man remembers that a poem in one style has filled him with consciousness of beauty and delight. Why conclude that this style constitutes the one access to the same impression? Why not rather perceive that, to take contemporaries, the beauty of *Thyrsis* is mainly produced by a fine suffusion of delicately-toned emotion; that of *Atalanta* by splendid and barely rivalled music of verse; of *In Memoriam* by its ordered and harmonious presentation of a sacred mood; of the *Spanish Gypsy*, in the parts where it reaches beauty, by a sublime ethical passion; of the *Earthly Paradise*, by sweet and simple reproduction of the spirit of the younger-hearted times? There are poems by Mr. Browning in which it is difficult, or, let us frankly say, impossible, for most of us at all events and as yet, to discover the beauty or the shape. But if beauty may not be denied to a

work which, abounding in many-coloured scenes and diverse characters, in vivid image and portraiture, wide reflection and multiform emotion, does further, by a broad thread of thought running under all, bind these impressions into one supreme and elevated conviction, then assuredly, whatever we may think of this passage or that, that episode or the other, the first volume or the third, we cannot deny that *The Ring and the Book*, in its perfection and integrity, fully satisfies the conditions of artistic triumph. Are we to ignore the grandeur of a colossal statue, and the nobility of the human conceptions which it embodies, because here and there we notice a flaw in the marble, a blemish in its colour, a jagged slip of the chisel? "It is not force of intellect," as George Eliot has said, "which causes ready repulsion from the aberration and eccentricities of greatness, any more than it is force of vision that causes the eye to explore the warts in a face bright with human expression; it is simply the negation of high sensibilities."

Then, it is asked by persons of another and still more rigorous temper, whether, as the world goes, the subject, or its treatment either, justifies

us in reading some twenty-one thousand and seventy-five lines, which do not seem to have any direct tendency to make us better or to improve mankind. This objection is an old enemy with a new face, and need not detain us, though perhaps the crude and incessant application of a narrow moral standard, thoroughly misunderstood, is one of the intellectual dangers of our time. You may now and again hear a man of really masculine character confess that though he loves Shakespeare and takes habitual delight in his works, he cannot see that he was a particularly moral writer. That is to say, Shakespeare is never directly didactic; you can no more get a system of morals out of his writings than you can get such a system out of the writings of the ever-searching Plato. But, if we must be quantitative, one great creative poet probably exerts a nobler, deeper, more permanent ethical influence than a dozen generations of professed moral teachers. It is a commonplace to the wise, and an everlasting puzzle to the foolish, that direct inculcation of morals should invariably prove so powerless an instrument, so futile a method. The truth is that nothing can be more

powerfully efficacious from the moral point of view than the exercise of an exalted creative art, stirring within the intelligence of the spectator active thought and curiosity about many types of character and many changeful issues of conduct and fortune, at once enlarging and elevating the range of his reflections on mankind, ever kindling his sympathies into the warm and continuous glow which purifies and strengthens nature, and fills men with that love of humanity which is the best inspirer of virtue. Is not this why music, too, is to be counted supreme among moral agents, soothing disorderly passion by diving down into the hidden deeps of character where there is no disorder, and touching the diviner mind? Given a certain rectitude as well as vigour of intelligence, then whatever stimulates the fancy, expands the imagination, enlivens meditation upon the great human drama, is essentially moral. Shakespeare does all this, as if sent Iris-like from the immortal gods, and *The Ring and the Book* has a measure of the same incomparable quality.

A profound and moving irony subsists in the very structure of the poem. Any other human transaction that ever was, tragic or comic or

plain prosaic, may be looked at in a like spirit. As the world's talk bubbled around the dumb anguish of Pompilia, or the cruelty and hate of Guido, so it does around the hourly tragedies of all times and places.

> "The instinctive theorizing whence a fact
> Looks to the eye as the eye likes the look."—
> "Vibrations in the general mind
> At depth of deed already out of reach."—
> "Live fact deadened down,
> Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away:"—

if we reflect that these are the conditions which have marked the formation of all the judgments that we hold by, and which are vivid in operation and effect at this hour, the deep irony and the impressive meaning of the poem are both obvious:—

> "So learn one lesson hence
> Of many which whatever lives should teach,
> This lesson that our human speech is naught,
> Our human testimony false, our fame
> And human estimation words and wind" (iv. 234).

It is characteristic of Mr. Browning that he thus casts the moral of his piece in an essentially intellectual rather than an emotional form, appealing to hard judgment rather than to imagina-

tive sensibility. Another living poet of original genius, of whom we have much right to complain that he gives us so little, ends a poem in two or three lines which are worth quoting here for the illustration they afford of what has just been said about Mr. Browning:—

> "Ah, what dusty answer gets the soul,
> When hot for certainties in this our life!—
> In tragic hints here see what evermore
> Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
> Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
> To throw that faint thin line upon the shore?"[1]

This is imaginative and sympathetic in thought as well as expression, and the truth and the image enter the writer's mind together, the one by the other. The lines convey poetic sentiment rather than reasoned truth; while Mr. Browning's close would be no unfit epilogue to a scientific essay on history, or a treatise on the errors of the human understanding and the inaccuracy of human opinion and judgment. This is the common note of his highest work; hard thought and reason illustrating themselves in dramatic circumstance, and the thought and reason are

[1] Mr. George Meredith's *Modern Love*.

not wholly fused, they exist apart and irradiate with far-shooting beams the moral confusion of the tragedy. This is, at any rate, emphatically true of *The Ring and the Book*. The fulness and variety of creation, the amplitude of the play and shifting of characters and motive and mood, are absolutely unforced, absolutely uninterfered with by the artificial exigencies of ethical or philosophic purpose. There is the purpose, full-grown, clear in outline, unmistakeable in significance. But the just proprieties of place and season are rigorously observed, because Mr. Browning, like every other poet of his quality, has exuberant and adequate delight in mere creation, simple presentment, and returns to bethink him of the meaning of it all only by-and-by. The pictures of Guido, of Pompilia, of Caponsacchi, of Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis, of Pope Innocent, are each of them full and adequate, as conceptions of character in active manifestation apart from the truth which the whole composition is meant to illustrate, and which clothes itself in this most excellent drama.

The scientific attitude of the intelligence is almost as markedly visible in Mr. Browning as

the strength of his creative power. The lesson of *The Ring and the Book* is perhaps as nearly positive as anything poetic can be. It is true that ultimately the drama ends in a vindication of what are called the ways of God to man, if indeed people are willing to put themselves off with a form of omnipotent justice which is simply a partial retribution inflicted on the monster, while torture and butchery fall upon victims more or less absolutely blameless. As if the fact of punishment at length overtaking the guilty Franceschini were any vindication of the justice of that assumed Providence, which had for so long a time awarded punishment far more harsh to the innocent Pompilia. So far as you can be content with the vindication of a justice of this less than equivocal quality, the sight of the monster brought to the

> "Close fetid cell,
> Where the hot vapour of an agony,
> Struck into drops on the cold wall, runs down
> Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears,"—

may in a sense prove satisfactory enough. But a man must be very dull who in reading the poem does not perceive that the very spirit

of it points to the thousand hazards which even this fragment of justice had to run in saving itself, and bringing about such partially righteous consummation as destiny permits. True opinion fares yet more perilously. *Half-Rome*, the *Other Half-Rome*, the *Tertium Quid*, which is perhaps most masterly and finished of the three, show us how ill truth sifts itself, to how many it never comes at all, how blurred, confused, next door to false, it is figured even to those who seize it by the hem of the garment. We may, perhaps, yawn over the intermingled Latin and law of Arcangeli, in spite of the humour of parts of it, as well as over the vapid floweriness of his rival; but for all that, we are touched keenly by the irony of the methods by which the two professional truth-sifters darken counsel with words, and make skilful sport of life and fact. The whole poem is a parable of the feeble and half-hopeless struggle which truth has to make against the ways of the world. That in this particular case truth and justice did win some pale sort of victory does not weaken the force of the lesson. The victory was such and so won as to stir in us awful thoughts of fatal risks and certain defeats, of

falsehood a thousand times clasped for truth, of fact a thousand times banished for fancy :—

"Because Pompilia's purity prevails,
Conclude you, all truth triumphs in the end?
So might those old inhabitants of the ark,
Witnessing haply their dove's safe return,
Pronounce there was no danger all the while
O' the deluge, to the creature's counterparts,
Aught that beat wing i' the world, was white or soft,
And that the lark, the thrush, the culver too,
Might equally have traversed air, found earth,
And brought back olive-branch in unharmed bill.
Methinks I hear the Patriarch's warning voice—
'Though this one breast, by miracle, return,
No wave rolls by, in all the waste, but bears
Within it some dead dove-like thing as dear,
Beauty made blank and harmlessness destroyed!'"
(iv. 218).

Or, to take another simile from the same magnificent passage, in which the fine dignity of the verse fitly matches the deep truth of the preacher's monitions :—

"Romans! An elder race possessed your land
Long ago, and a false faith lingered still,
As shades do, though the morning-star be out.
Doubtless, some pagan of the twilight day
Has often pointed to a cavern-mouth,
Obnoxious to beholders, hard by Rome,
And said,—nor he a bad man, no, nor fool,—

Only a man, so, blind like all his mates,—
'Here skulk in safety, lurk, defying law,
The devotees to execrable creed,
Adoring—with what culture . . Jove, avert
Thy vengeance from us worshippers of thee! . .
What rites obscene—their idol-god, an Ass!'
So went the word forth, so acceptance found,
So century re-echoed century,
Cursed the accursed,—and so, from sire to son,
You Romans cried, 'The offscourings of our race
Corrupt within the depths there: fitly, fiends
Perform a temple-service o'er the dead:
Child, gather garment round thee, pass nor pry!'
So groaned your generations: till the time
Grew ripe, and lightning hath revealed, belike,—
Thro' crevice peeped into by curious fear,—
Some object even fear could recognise
I' the place of spectres; on the illumined wall,
To-wit, some nook, tradition talks about,
Narrow and short, a corpse's length, no more:
And by it, in the due receptacle,
The little rude brown lamp of earthenware,
The cruse, was meant for flowers, but held the blood,
The rough-scratched palm-branch, and the legend left,
Pro Christo. Then the mystery lay clear:
The abhorred one was a martyr all the time,
A saint whereof earth was not worthy. What?
Do you continue in the old belief?
Where blackness bides unbroke, must devils be?
Is it so certain, not another cell
O' the myriad that make up the catacomb,
Contains some saint a second flash would show?

Will you ascend into the light of day
And, having recognised a martyr's shrine,
Go join the votaries that gape around
Each vulgar god that awes the market-place?'
(iv. 219).

With less impetuosity and a more weightily reasoned argument the Pope confronts the long perplexity and entanglement of circumstances with the fatuous optimism which insists that somehow justice and virtue do rule in the world. Consider all the doings at Arezzo, before and after the consummation of the tragedy. What of the Aretine archbishop, to whom Pompilia cried "Protect me from the fiend!"—

"No, for thy Guido is one heady, strong,
Dangerous to disquiet: let him bide!
He needs some bone to mumble, help amuse
The darkness of his den with: so, the fawn
Which limps up bleeding to my foot and lies,
—Come to me, daughter,—thus I throw him back!"

Then the monk to whom she went, imploring him to write to Rome:—

He meets the first cold sprinkle of the world
And shudders to the marrow, 'Save this child?
Oh, my superiors, oh, the Archbishop here!
Who was it dared lay hand upon the ark
His betters saw fall nor put finger forth?'"

Worst of all, the Convent of the Convertites, women to whom she was consigned for help,

"They do help; they are prompt to testify
To her pure life and saintly dying days.
She dies, and lo, who seemed so poor, proves rich!
What does the body that lives through helpfulness
To women for Christ's sake? The kiss turns bite,
The dove's note changes to the crow's cry: judge!
'Seeing that this our Convent claims of right
What goods belong to those we succour, be
The same proved women of dishonest life,—
And seeing that this Trial made appear
Pompilia was in such predicament,—
The Convent hereupon pretends to said
Succession of Pompilia, issues writ,
And takes possession by the Fisc's advice.'
Such is their attestation to the cause
Of Christ, who had one saint at least, they hoped:
But, is a title-deed to filch, a corpse
To slander, and an infant-heir to cheat?
Christ must give up his gains then! They unsay
All the fine speeches,—who was saint is whore."

It is not wonderful if his review of all the mean and dolorous circumstance of this cycle of wrong brings the Pope face to face with the unconquerable problem for the Christian believer, the keystone of the grim arch of religious doubt and despair, through which the courageous soul must needs pass to creeds of reason and life. Where is

"the gloriously decisive change, the immeasurable metamorphosis" in human worth that should in some sort justify the consummate price that had been paid for man these seventeen hundred years before?

> "Had a mere adept of the Rosy Cross
> Spent his life to consummate the Great Work,
> Would not we start to see the stuff it touched
> Yield not a grain more than the vulgar got
> By the old smelting-process years ago?
> If this were sad to see in just the sage
> Who should profess so much, perform no more,
> What is it when suspected in that Power
> Who undertook to make and made the world,
> Devised and did effect man, body and soul,
> Ordained salvation for them both, and yet . . .
> Well, is the thing we see, salvation?"

It is certain that by whatever other deficiencies it may be marked *The Ring and the Book* is blameless for the most characteristic of all the shortcomings of contemporary verse, a grievous sterility of thought. And why? Because sterility of thought is the blight struck into the minds of men by timorous and halt-footed scepticism, by a half-hearted dread of what chill thing the truth might prove itself, by unmanly reluctance or moral incapacity to carry the faculty

of poetic vision over the whole field; and because Mr. Browning's intelligence, on the other hand, is masculine and courageous, moving cheerfully on the solid earth of an articulate and defined conviction, and careful not to omit realities from the conception of the great drama, merely for being unsightly to the too fastidious eye, or jarring in the ear, or too bitterly perplexing to faith or understanding. It is this resolute feeling after and grip of fact which is at the root of his distinguishing fruitfulness of thought, and it is exuberance of thought, spontaneous, well-marked, and sapid, that keeps him out of poetical preaching, on the one hand, and mere making of music, on the other. Regret as we may the fantastic rudeness and unscrupulous barbarisms into which Mr. Browning's art too often falls, and find what fault we may with his method, let us ever remember how much he has to say, and how effectively he communicates the shock of new thought which was first imparted to him by the vivid conception of a large and far-reaching story. The value of the thought, indeed, is not to be measured by poetic tests; but still the thought has poetic value, too, for it is this which has

stirred in the writer that keen yet impersonal interest in the actors of his story and in its situations which is one of the most certain notes of true dramatic feeling, and which therefore gives the most unfailing stimulus to the interest of the appreciative reader.

At first sight *The Ring and the Book* appears to be absolutely wanting in that grandeur which, in a composition of such enormous length, criticism must pronounce to be a fundamental and indispensable element. In an ordinary way this effect of grandeur is produced either by some heroic action surrounded by circumstances of worthy stateliness, as in the finest of the Greek plays; or as in *Paradise Lost* by the presence of personages of majestic sublimity of bearing and association; or as in *Faust* or *Hamlet* by the stupendous moral abysses which the poet discloses fitfully on this side and that. None of these things are to be found in *The Ring and the Book*. The action of Caponsacchi, though noble and disinterested, is hardly heroic in the highest dramatic sense, for it is not much more than the lofty defiance of a conventionality, the contemplated penalty being only small; not, for example,

as if life or ascertained happiness had been the fixed or even probable price of his magnanimous enterprise. There was no marching to the stake, no deliberate encountering of the mightier risks, no voluntary submission to a lifelong endurance. True, this came in the end, but it was an end unforeseen, and one, therefore, not to be associated with the first conception of the original act. Besides, Guido is so saturated with hateful and ignoble motive as to fill the surrounding air with influences that preclude heroic association. It has been said of the great men to whom the Byzantine Empire once or twice gave birth, that even their fame has a curiously tarnished air, as if that too had been touched by the evil breath of the times. And in like manner we may say of Guido Franceschini that even to have touched him in the way of resistance detracts from pure heroism. Perhaps the same consideration explains the comparative disappointment which most people seem to have felt with *Pompilia* in the third volume. Again, there is nothing which can be rightly called majesty of character visible in one personage or another. There is high devotion in Caponsacchi, a large-minded and

free sagacity in Pope Innocent, and around Pompilia the tragic pathos of an incurable woe, which by its intensity might raise her to grandeur if it sprang from some more solemn source than the mere malignity and baseness of an unworthy oppressor. Lastly, there is nothing in *The Ring and the Book* of that "certain incommensurableness" which Goethe found in his own *Faust*. The poem is kept closely concrete and strictly commensurable by the very framework of its story:—

> "pure crude fact,
> Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,
> And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since."

It moves from none of the supernatural agencies which give the impulse to our interest in *Faust*, nor from the sublimer passions and yearning after things unspeakable alike in *Faust* and in *Hamlet*.

Yet, notwithstanding its lack of the accustomed elements of grandeur, there is a profound impressiveness about *The Ring and the Book* which must arise from the presence of some other fine compensating or equivalent quality. Perhaps one may say that this equivalent for grandeur is

a certain simple touching of our sense of human kinship, of the large identity of the conditions of the human lot, of the piteous fatalities which bring the lives of the great multitude of men to be little more than "grains of sand to be blown by the wind." This old woe, the poet says, now in the fulness of the days again lives,

"*If precious be the soul of man to man.*"

This is the deeply implanted sentiment to which his poem makes successful appeal. Nor is it mocked by mere outpouring of scorn on the blind and fortuitous groping of men and societies of men after truth and justice and traces of the watchfulness of "the unlidded eye of God." Rather it is this inability to see beyond the facts of our condition to some diviner, ever-present law, which helps to knit us to our kind, our brethren "whom we have seen."

"Clouds obscure—
But for which obscuration all were bright?
Too hastily concluded! Sun-suffused,
A cloud may soothe the eye made blind by blaze,—
Better the very clarity of heaven:
The soft streaks are the beautiful and dear.
What but the weakness in a faith supplies
The incentive to humanity, no strength

Absolute, irresistible, comports ?
How can man love but what he yearns to help '
And that which men think weakness within strength
But angels know for strength and stronger get—
What were it else but the first things made new,
But repetition of the miracle,
The divine instance of self-sacrifice
That never ends and aye begins for man ? "

MEMORIALS OF A MAN OF LETTERS.

WHAT are the qualities of a good contributor? What makes a good Review? Is the best literature produced by the writer who does nothing else but write, or by the man who tempers literature by affairs? What are the different recommendations of the rival systems of anonymity and signature? What kind of change, if any, has passed over periodical literature since those two great periodicals, the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*, held sway? These and a number of other questions in the same matter—some of them obviously not to be opened with propriety in these pages—must naturally be often present to the mind of any one who is concerned in the control of a Review, and a volume has just been printed which sets such musings once more astir. Mr. Macvey Napier was the editor of the

Edinburgh Review from 1829—when Jeffrey, after a reign of seven-and-twenty years, resigned it into his hands—until his death in 1847. A portion of the correspondence addressed to Mr. Napier during this period is full of personal interest both to the man of letters and to that more singular being, the Editor, the impresario of men of letters, the *entrepreneur* of the spiritual power.

To manage an opera-house is usually supposed to tax human powers more urgently than any position save that of a general in the very heat and stress of battle. The orchestra, the chorus, the subscribers, the first tenor, a pair of rival prima donnas, the newspapers, the box-agents in Bond Street, the army of hangers-on in the flies—all combine to demand such gifts of tact, resolution, patience, foresight, tenacity, flexibility, as are only expected from the great ruler or the great soldier. The editor of a periodical of public consideration—and the *Edinburgh Review* in the hands of Mr. Napier was the avowed organ of the ruling Whig powers—is sorely tested in the same way. The rival house may bribe his stars. His popular epigrammatist is

sometimes as full of humours as a spoiled soprano. The favourite pyrotechnist is systematically late and procrastinatory, or is piqued because his punctuation or his paragraphs have been meddled with. The contributor whose article would be in excellent time if it did not appear before the close of the century, or never appeared at all, pesters you with warnings that a month's delay is a deadly blow to progress, and stays the great procession of the ages. The contributor who could profitably fill a sheet, insists on sending a treatise. Sir George Cornewall Lewis, who had charge of the *Edinburgh* for a short space, truly described prolixity as the *bête noire* of an editor. "Every contributor," he said, "has some special reason for wishing to write at length on his own subject."

Ah, que de choses dans un menuet! cried Marcel, the great dancing-master, and ah, what things in the type and ἰδέα of an article, cries an editor with the enthusiasm of his calling; such proportion, measure, comprehension, variety of topics, pithiness of treatment, all within a space appointed with Procrustean rigour. This is what the soul of the volunteer contributor is

dull to. Of the minor vexations who can tell? There is one single tribulation dire enough to poison life—even if there were no other—and this is disorderly manuscript. Empson, Mr. Napier's well-known contributor, was one of the worst offenders; he would never even take the trouble to mark his paragraphs. It is my misfortune to have a manuscript before me at this moment that would fill thirty of these pages, and yet from beginning to end there is no indication that it is not to be read at a single breath. The paragraph ought to be, and in all good writers it is, as real and as sensible a division as the sentence. It is an organic member in prose composition, with a beginning, a middle, and an end, just as a stanza is an organic and definite member in the composition of an ode. "I fear my manuscript is rather disorderly," says another, "but I will correct carefully in print." Just so. Because he is too heedless to do his work in a workmanlike way, he first inflicts fatigue and vexation on the editor whom he expects to read his paper; second, he inflicts considerable and quite needless expense on the publisher; and thirdly, he inflicts a great deal of tedious and

thankless labour on the printers, who are for the most part far more meritorious persons than fifth-rate authors. It is true that Burke returned such disordered proofs that the printer usually found it least troublesome to set the whole afresh, and Miss Martineau tells a story of a Scotch compositor who fled from Edinburgh to avoid Carlyle's manuscript, and to his horror was presently confronted with a piece of the too familiar copy which made him cry, "Lord, have mercy! Have *you* got that man to print for!" But most editors will cheerfully forgive such transgressions to all contributors who will guarantee that they write as well as Burke or Carlyle. Alas! it is usually the case that those who have least excuse are the worst offenders. The slovenliest manuscripts come from persons to whom the difference between an hour and a minute is of the very smallest importance. This, however, is a digression, only to be excused partly by the natural desire to say a word against one's persecutors, and partly by a hope that some persons of sensitive conscience may be led to ponder whether there may not be after all some moral obligations even towards editors and printers.

Mr. Napier had one famous contributor, who stands out alone in the history of editors. Lord Brougham's traditional connection with the Review,—he had begun to write either in its first or third number, and had written in it ever since—his encyclopædic ignorance, his power, his great fame in the country, and the prestige which his connection reflected on the Review, all made him a personage with whom it would have been most imprudent to quarrel. Yet the position in which Mr. Napier was placed after Brougham's breach with the Whigs, was one of the most difficult in which the conductor of a great organ could possibly be placed. The Review was the representative, the champion, and the mouthpiece of the Whig party, and of the Whigs who were in office. Before William IV. dismissed the Whigs in 1834 as arbitrarily as his father had dismissed the Whigs in 1784, Brougham had covered himself with disrepute among his party by a thousand pranks, and after the dismissal he disgusted them by asking the new Chancellor to make him Chief Baron of the Exchequer. When Lord Melbourne returned to power in the following year, this and other

escapades were remembered against him. "If left out," said Lord Melbourne, "he would indeed be dangerous; but if taken in, he would simply be destructive." So Brougham was left out, Pepys was made Chancellor, and the Premier compared himself to a man who has broken with a termagant mistress and married the best of cooks. Mr. Napier was not so happy. The termagant was left on his hands. He had to keep terms with a contributor who hated with deadly hatred the very government that the Review existed to support. No editor ever had such a contributor as Brougham in the long history of editorial torment since the world began. He scolds, he storms, he hectors, he lectures; he is for ever threatening desertion and prophesying ruin; he exhausts the vocabulary of opprobrium against his correspondent's best friends; they are silly slaves, base traitors, a vile clique "whose treatment of me has been the very *ne plus ultra* of ingratitude, baseness, and treachery." He got the Review and its editor into a scrape which shook the world at the time (1834), by betraying Cabinet secrets to spite Lord Durham. His cries against his ad-

versaries are as violent as the threats of Ajax in his tent, and as loud as the bellowings of Philoctetes at the mouth of his cave. Here is one instance out of a hundred :—

"That is a trifle, and I only mention it to beg of you to pluck up a little courage, and not be alarmed every time any of the little knot of threateners annoy you. *They want to break off all kind of connection between me and the Edinburgh Review.* I have long seen it. Their fury against the article in the last number knows no bounds, and they will never cease till they worry you out of your connection with me, and get the whole control of the Review into their own hands, by forcing you to resign it yourself. A *party and a personal* engine is all they want to make it. What possible right can any of these silly slaves have to object to my opinion being—what it truly is—against the Holland House theory of Lord Chatham's madness? I *know* that Lord Grenville treated it with contempt. I know others now living who did so too, and I know that so stout a Whig as Sir P. Francis was clearly of that opinion, and he knew Lord Chatham personally. I had every ground to believe that Horace Walpole, a vile, malignant, and unnatural wretch, though a very clever writer of Letters, was nine-tenths of the Holland House authority for the tale. I knew that a baser man in character, or a meaner in capacity than the first Lord Holland existed not, even in those days of job and mediocrity. Why, then, was I bound to take a false view because Lord Holland's family have inherited his hatred of a great rival?"

Another instance is as follows:—

"I solicit your best attention to the fate which seems hastening upon the *Edinburgh Review*. The having always been free from the least control of booksellers is one of its principal distinctions, and long was peculiarly so—perhaps it still has it *nearly* to itself. But if it shall become a *Treasury* journal, I hardly see any great advantage in one kind of independence without the rest. Nay, I doubt if its *literary* freedom, any more than its political, will long survive. Books will be treated according as the Treasury, or their under-strappers, regard the authors. . . . . But, is it after all possible that the Review should be suffered to sink into such a state of subserviency that it dares not insert any discussion upon a general question of politics because it might give umbrage to the Government of the day? I pass over the undeniable fact that it is *underlings* only whom you are scared by, and that the Ministers themselves have no such inordinate pretension as to dream of interfering. I say nothing of those underlings generally, except this, that I well know the race, and a more despicable, above all, in point of judgment, exists not. Never mind their threats, they *can* do no harm. Even if any of them are contributo be assured they never will withdraw because you cho to keep your course free and independent."

Mr. Napier, who seems to have been one o the most considerate and high-minded of m en, was moved to energetic remonstrance on t his occasion. Lord Brougham explained his stro ng

language away, but he was incapable of really controlling himself, and the strain was never lessened until 1843, when the correspondence ceases, and we learn that there had been a quarrel between him and his too long-suffering correspondent. Yet John Allen,—that able scholar and conspicuous figure in the annals of Holland House—wrote of Brougham to Mr. Napier :—"He is not a malignant or bad-hearted man, but he is an unscrupulous one, and where his passions are concerned or his vanity irritated, there is no excess of which he is not capable." Of Brougham's strong and manly sense, when passion or vanity did not cloud it, and even of a sort of careful justice, these letters give more than one instance. The *Quarterly Review*, for instance, had an article on Romilly's Memoirs, which to Romilly's friends seemed to do him less than justice. Brougham took a more sensible view.

"Surely we had no right whatever to expect that they whom Romilly had all his life so stoutly opposed, and who were treated by him with great harshness, should treat him as his friends would do, and at the very moment when a most injudicious act of his family was bringing out all his secret thoughts against them.

Only place yourself in the same position, and suppose that Canning's private journals had been published,—the journals he may have kept while the bitterest enemy of the Whigs, and in every page of which there must have been some passage offensive to the feelings of the living and of the friends of the dead. Would any mercy have been shown to Canning's character and memory by any of the Whig party, either in society or in Reviews? Would the line have been drawn of only attacking Canning's executors, who published the papers, and leaving Canning himself untouched? Clearly and certainly not, and yet I am putting a very much weaker case, for we had joined Canning, and all political enmity was at an end: whereas the Tories and Romilly never had for an hour laid aside their mutual hostility."

And if he was capable of equity, Brougham was also capable of hearty admiration, even of an old friend who had on later occasions gone into a line which he intensely disliked. It is a relief in the pages of blusterous anger and raging censure to come upon what he says of Jeffrey.

"I can truly say that there never in all my life crossed my mind one single unkind feeling respecting him, or indeed any feeling but that of the warmest affection and the most unmingled admiration of his character, believing and knowing him to be as excellent and amiable as he is great in the ordinary, and, as I think, the far less important sense of the word."

Of the value of Brougham's contributions we cannot now judge. They will not, in spite of their energy and force, bear re-reading to-day, and perhaps the same may be said of three-fourths of Jeffrey's once famous essays. Brougham's self-confidence is heroic. He believed that he could make a speech for Bolingbroke, but by-and-by he had sense enough to see that, in order to attempt this, he ought to read Bolingbroke for a year, and then practise for another year. In 1838 he thought nothing of undertaking, amid all the demands of active life, such a bagatelle as a History of the French Revolution. "I have some little knack of narrative," he says, "the most difficult by far of all styles, and never yet attained in perfection but by Hume and Livy; and I bring as much oratory and science to the task as most of my predecessors." But what sort of science? And what has oratory to do with it? And how could he deceive himself into thinking that he could retire to write a history? Nobody that ever lived would have more speedily found out the truth of Voltaire's saying, "*Le repos est une bonne chose, mais l'ennui est son frère.*" The truth is that one learns,

after a certain observation of the world, to divide one's amazement pretty equally between the literary voluptuary or over-fastidious collegian, on the one hand, who is so impressed by the size of his subject that he never does more than collect material and make notes, and the presumptuous politician, on the other hand, who thinks that he can write a history or settle the issues of philosophy and theology in odd half-hours. The one is so enfeebled in will and literary energy after his *viginti annorum lucubrationes*; the other is so accustomed to be content with the hurry, the unfinishedness, the rough-and-ready methods of practical affairs, and they both in different ways measure the worth and seriousness of literature so wrongly in relation to the rest of human interests.

The relations between Lord Brougham and Mr. Napier naturally suggest a good many reflections on the vexed question of the comparative advantages of the old and the new theory of a periodical. The new theory is that a periodical should not be an organ but an open pulpit, and that each writer should sign his name. Without disrespect to ably conducted and eminent

contemporaries of long standing, it may be said that the tide of opinion and favour is setting in this direction. Yet, on the whole, experience perhaps leads to a doubt whether the gains of the system of signature are so very considerable as some of us once expected. An editor on the new system is no doubt relieved of a certain measure of responsibility. Lord Cockburn's panegyric on the first great editor may show what was expected from a man in such a position as Jeffrey's. "He had to discover, and to train, authors; to discern what truth and the public mind required; to suggest subjects; to reject, and, more offensive still, to improve, contributions; to keep down absurdities; to infuse spirit; to excite the timid; to repress violence; to soothe jealousies; to quell mutinies; to watch times; and all this in the morning of the reviewing day, before experience had taught editors conciliatory firmness, and contributors reasonable submission. He directed and controlled the elements he presided over with a master's judgment. There was not one of his associates who could have even held these elements together for a single year. . . . . Inferior to these excel-

lences, but still important, was his dexterity in revising the writings of others. Without altering the general tone or character of the composition, he had great skill in leaving out defective ideas or words, and in so aiding the original by lively or graceful touches, that reasonable authors were surprised and charmed on seeing how much better they looked than they thought they would" (Cockburn's *Life of Jeffrey*, i. 301).

From such toils and dangers as these the editor of a Review with signed articles is in the main happily free. He has usually suggestions to make, for his experience has probably given him points of view as to the effectiveness of this or that feature of an article for its own purpose, which would not occur to a writer. The writer is absorbed in his subject, and has been less accustomed to think of the public. But this exercise of a claim to a general acquiescence in the judgment and experience of a man who has the best reasons for trying to judge rightly, is a very different thing from the duty of drilling contributors and dressing contributions as they were dressed and drilled by Jeffrey. As Southey said, when groaning under the mutilations inflicted

by Gifford on his contributions to the *Quarterly*, "there must be a power expurgatory in the hands of the editor; and the misfortune is that editors frequently think it incumbent on them to use that power merely because they have it" (Southey's Life, iv. 18). This is probably true on the anonymous system, where the editor is answerable for every word, and for the literary form no less than for the substantial soundness or interest of an article. In a man of weakish literary vanity—Jeffrey was evidently full of it—there may well be a constant itch to set his betters right in trifles, as Gifford thought that he could mend Southey's adjectives. To a vain editor, or a too masterful editor, the temptation under the anonymous system is no doubt strong. M. Buloz, it is true, the renowned conductor of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, is said to have insisted on, and to have freely practised, the fullest editorial prerogative over articles that were openly signed by the most eminent names in France. But M. Buloz had no competitor, and those who did not choose to submit to his Sultanic despotism were shut out from the only pulpit whence they were sure of addressing the congregation that

they wanted. In England contributors are better off; and no editor of a signed periodical would feel either bound or permitted to take such trouble about mere wording of sentences as Gifford and Jeffrey were in the habit of taking.

There is, however, another side to this, from an editor's point of view. With responsibility—not merely for commas and niceties and literary kickshaws, but in its old sense—disappears also a portion of the interest of editorial labour. One would suppose it must be more interesting to command a man-of-war than a trading vessel; it would be more interesting to lead a regiment than to keep a tilting-yard. But the times are not ripe for such enterprises. Of literary ability of a good and serviceable kind there is a hundred or five hundred times more in the country than there was when Jeffrey, Smith, Brougham, and Horner devised their Review in a ninth storey in Edinburgh seventy-six years ago. It is the cohesion of a political creed that is gone, and the strength and fervour of a political school. The principles that inspired that group of strong men have been worked out. After their reforms had been achieved, the next great school was economic.

and though it produced one fine orator, its work was at no time literary. The Manchester school with all their shortcomings had at least the signal distinction of attaching their views on special political questions to a general and presiding conception of the modern phase of civilisation, as industrial and pacific. The next party of advance, when it is formed, will certainly borrow from Cobden and Bright their hatred of war and their hatred of imperialism. After the sagacity and enlightenment of this school came the school of persiflage. A knot of vigorous and brilliant men towards 1856 rallied round the late editor of the *Saturday Review*,—and a strange chief he was for such a group,—but their flag was that of the Red Rover. They gave Philistinism many a shrewd blow, but perhaps at the same time helped to some degree—with other far deeper and stronger forces—to produce that sceptical and centrifugal state of mind, which now tends to nullify organised liberalism and paralyse the spirit of improvement. The Benthamites, led first by James Mill, and afterwards in a secondary degree by John Mill, had pushed a number of political improvements in the radical and democratic

direction during the time when the *Edinburgh* so powerfully represented more orthodox liberalism. They were the last important group of men who started together from a set of common principles, accepted a common programme of practical applications, and set to work in earnest and with due order and distribution of parts to advocate the common cause.

At present [1878] there is no similar agreement either among the younger men in parliament, or among a sufficiently numerous group of writers outside of parliament. The Edinburgh Reviewers were most of them students of the university of that city. The Westminster Reviewers had all sat at the feet of Bentham. Each group had thus a common doctrine and a positive doctrine. In practical politics it does not much matter by what different roads men have travelled to a given position. But in an organ intended to lead public opinion towards certain changes, or to hold it steadfast against wayward gusts of passion, its strength would be increased a hundredfold if all the writers in it were inspired by that thorough unity of conviction which comes from sincerely accepting a common set of principles to start

from, and reaching practical conclusions by the same route. We are probably not very far from a time when such a group might form itself, and its work would for some years lie in the formation of a general body of opinion, rather than in practical realisation of this or that measure. The success of the French Republic, the peaceful order of the United States, perhaps some trouble within our own borders, will lead men with open minds to such a conception of a high and stable type of national life as will unite a sufficient number of them in a common project for pressing with systematic iteration for a complete set of organic changes. A country with such a land-system, such an electoral system, such a monarchy, as ours, has a trying time before it. Those will be doing good service who shall unite to prepare opinion for the inevitable changes. At the present moment the only motto that can be inscribed on the flag of a liberal Review is the general device of Progress, each writer interpreting it in his own sense, and within such limits as he may set for himself. For such a state of things signature is the natural condition, and an editor, even of a signed Review, would hardly decline to accept

the account of his function which we find Jeffrey giving to Mr. Napier :—"There are three legitimate considerations by which you should be guided in your conduct as editor generally, and particularly as to the admission or rejection of important articles of a political sort. 1. The effect of your decision on the other contributors upon whom you mainly rely; 2. its effect on the sale and circulation, and on the just authority of the work with the great body of its readers; and, 3. your own deliberate opinion as to the safety or danger of the doctrines maintained in the article under consideration, and its tendency either to promote or retard the practical adoption of those liberal principles to which, and *their practical advancement,* you must always consider the journal as devoted."

As for discovering and training authors, the editor under the new system has inducements that lie entirely the other way; namely, to find as many authors as possible whom the public has already discovered and accepted for itself. Young unknown writers certainly have not gained anything by the new system. Neither perhaps can they be said to have lost, for though of

two articles of equal merit an editor would naturally choose the one which should carry the additional recommendation of a name of recognised authority, yet any marked superiority in literary brilliance or effective argument or originality of view would be only too eagerly welcomed in any Review in England. So much public interest is now taken in periodical literature, and the honourable competition in securing variety, weight, and attractiveness is so active, that there is no risk of a literary candle remaining long under a bushel. Miss Martineau says :—"I have always been anxious to extend to young or struggling authors the sort of aid which would have been so precious to me in that winter of 1829-30, and I know that, in above twenty years, I have never succeeded but once." One of the most distinguished editors in London, who had charge of a periodical for many years, told the present writer what comes to the same thing, namely, that in no single case during all these years did a volunteer contributor of real quality, or with any promise of eminence, present himself or herself. So many hundreds think themselves called, so few are chosen. It used to be argued

that the writer under the anonymous system was hidden behind a screen and robbed of his well-earned distinction. In truth, however, it is impossible for a writer of real distinction to remain anonymous. If a writer in a periodical interests the public, they are sure to find out who he is.

Again, there is folly unfathomable in a periodical affecting an eternal consistency, and giving itself the airs of continuous individuality, and being careful not to talk sense on a given question to-day because its founders talked nonsense upon it fifty years ago. This is quite true. There is a monstrous charlatanry about the old editorial We, but perhaps there are some tolerably obvious openings for charlatanry of a different kind under our own system. The man who writes in his own name may sometimes be tempted to say what he knows he is expected from his position or character to say, rather than what he would have said if his personality were not concerned. As far as honesty goes, signature perhaps offers as many inducements to one kind of insincerity, as anonymity offers to another kind. And on the public it might perhaps be contended that there is an

effect of a rather similar sort. They are in some cases tempted away from serious discussion of the matter, into frivolous curiosity and gossip about the man. All this criticism of the principle of which the *Fortnightly Review* was the earliest English adherent, will not be taken as the result in the present writer of Chamfort's *maladie des désabusés*; that would be both extremely ungrateful and without excuse or reason. It is merely a fragment of disinterested contribution to the study of a remarkable change that is passing over a not unimportant department of literature. One gain alone counterbalances all the drawbacks, and that is a gain that could hardly have been foreseen or expected; I mean the freedom with which the great controversies of religion and theology have been discussed in the new Reviews. The removal of the mask has led to an outburst of plain speaking on these subjects, which to Mr. Napier's generation would have seemed simply incredible. The frank avowal of unpopular beliefs or non-beliefs has raised the whole level of the discussion, and perhaps has been even more advantageous to the ortho-

dox in teaching them more humility, than to the heterodox in teaching them more courage and honesty.

Let us return to Mr. Napier's volume. We have said that it is impossible for a great writer to be anonymous. No reader will need to be told who among Mr. Napier's correspondents is the writer of the following :—

"I have been thinking sometimes, likewise, of a paper on Napoleon, a man whom, though handled to the extreme of triteness, it will be long years before we understand. Hitherto in the English tongue, there is next to nothing that betokens insight into him, or even sincere belief of such, on the part of the writer. I should like to study the man with what heartiness I could, and form to myself some intelligible picture of him, both as a biographical and as a historical figure, in both of which senses he is our chief contemporary wonder, and in some sort the epitome of his age. This, however, were a task of far more difficulty than Byron, and perhaps not so promising at present."

And if there is any difficulty in recognising the same hand in the next proposal, it arises only from the circumstance that it is this writer above all others who has made Benthamism a term of reproach on the lips of men less wise than himself:—

"A far finer essay were a faithful, loving, and yet critical, and in part condemnatory, delineation of Jeremy Bentham, and his place and working in this section of the world's history. Bentham will not be put down by logic, and should not be put down, for we need him greatly as a backwoodsman: neither can reconciliation be effected till the one party understands and is just to the other. Bentham is a denyer; he denies with a loud and universally convincing voice; his fault is that he can *affirm* nothing, except that money is pleasant in the purse, and food in the stomach, and that by this simplest of all beliefs he can reorganise society. He can shatter it in pieces—no thanks to him, for its old fastenings are quite rotten—but he cannot reorganise it; this is work for quite others than he. Such an essay on Bentham, however, were a great task for any one; for me a very great one, and perhaps rather out of my road."

Perhaps Carlyle would have agreed that Mr. Mill's famous pair of essays on Bentham and Coleridge have served the purpose which he had in his mind, though we may well regret the loss of such a picture of Bentham's philosophic personality as he would surely have given us. It is touching to think of him whom we all know as the most honoured name among living veterans of letters,[1] passing through the vexed ordeal of the young recruit, and battling for

[1] Carlyle died on February 5, 1881.

his own against the waywardness of critics and the blindness of publishers. In 1831 he writes to Mr. Napier: "All manner of perplexities have occurred in the publishing of my poor book, which perplexities I could only cut asunder, not unloose; so the MS. like an unhappy ghost still lingers on the wrong side of Styx; the Charon of —— Street durst not risk it in his *sutilis cymba*, so it leaped ashore again." And three months later: "I have given up the notion of hawking my little Manuscript Book about any further; for a long time it has lain quiet in its drawer, waiting for a better day." And yet this little book was nothing less than the History of the French Revolution.

It might be a lesson to small men to see the reasonableness, sense, and patience of these greater men. Macaulay's letters show him to have been a pattern of good sense and considerateness. Mr. Carlyle seems indeed to have found Jeffrey's editorial vigour more than could be endured

"My respected friend your predecessor had some difficulty with me in adjusting the respective prerogatives of Author and Editor, for though not, as I hope,

insensible to fair reason, I used sometimes to rebel against what I reckoned mere authority, and this partly perhaps as a matter of literary conscience; being wont to write nothing without studying it if possible to the bottom, and writing always with an almost painful feeling of scrupulosity, that light editorial hacking and hewing to right and left was in general nowise to my mind."

But we feel that the fault must have lain with Jeffrey; the qualifications that Lord Cockburn admired so much were not likely to be to the taste of a man of Mr. Carlyle's grit. That did not prevent the most original of Mr. Napier's contributors from being one of the most just and reasonable.

"I have, barely within my time, finished that paper ['Characteristics'], to which you are now heartily welcome, if you have room for it. The doctrines here set forth have mostly long been familiar convictions with me; yet it is perhaps only within the last twelvemonth that the public utterance of some of them could have seemed a duty. I have striven to express myself with what guardedness was possible; and, as there will now be no time for correcting proofs, I must leave it wholly in your editorial hands. Nay, should it on due consideration appear to you in your place (for I see that matter dimly, and nothing is clear but my own mind and the general condition of the world), unadvisable to print the paper at all, then pray understand, my dear

Sir, now and always, that I am no unreasonable man; but if dogmatic enough (as Jeffrey used to call it) in my own beliefs, also truly desirous to be just towards those of others. I shall, in all sincerity, beg of you to do, without fear of offence (for in *no* point of view will there be any), what you yourself see good. A mighty work lies before the writers of this time."

It is always interesting, to the man of letters at any rate if not to his neighbours, to find what was first thought by men of admitted competence of the beginnings of writers who are now seen to have made a mark on the world. "When the reputation of authors is made," said Sainte-Beuve, "it is easy to speak of them *convenablement*: we have only to guide ourselves by the common opinion. But at the start, at the moment when they are trying their first flight and are in part ignorant of themselves, then to judge them with tact, with precision, not to exaggerate their scope, to predict their flight, or divine their limits, to put the reasonable objections in the midst of all due respect—this is the quality of the critic who is born to be a critic." We have been speaking of Mr. Carlyle. This is what Jeffrey thought of him in 1832:—

"I fear Carlyle will not do, that is, if you do not

take the liberties and the pains with him that I did, by striking out freely, and writing in occasionally. The misfortune is, that he is very obstinate, and unluckily in a place like this, he finds people enough to abet and applaud him, to intercept the operation of the otherwise infallible remedy of general avoidance and neglect. It is a great pity, for he is a man of genius and industry, and with the capacity of being an elegant and impressive writer"

The notion of Jeffrey occasionally writing elegantly and impressively into Carlyle's proof-sheets is rather striking. Some of Jeffrey's other criticisms sound very curiously in our ear in these days. It is startling to find Mill's *Logic* described (1843) as a "great unreadable book, and its elaborate demonstration of axioms and truisms." A couple of years later Jeffrey admits, in speaking of Mr. Mill's paper on Guizot—"Though I have long thought very highly of his powers as a reasoner, I scarcely gave him credit for such large and sound views of *realities* and practical results as are displayed in this article." Sir James Stephen—the distinguished sire of two distinguished contributors, who may remind more than one editor of our generation of the Horatian saying, that

"Fortes creantur fortibus et bonis,
. . neque imbellem feroces
Progenerant aquilæ columbam"

—this excellent writer took a more just measure of the book which Jeffrey thought unreadable.

"My more immediate object in writing is to remind you of John Mill's book [System of Logic], of which I have lately been reading a considerable part, and I have done so with the conviction that it is one of the most remarkable productions of this nineteenth century. Exceedingly debatable indeed, but most worthy of debate, are many of his favourite tenets, especially those of the last two or three chapters. No man is fit to encounter him who is not thoroughly conversant with the moral sciences which he handles; and remembering what you told me of your own studies under Dugald Stewart, I cannot but recommend the affair to your own personal attention. You will find very few men fit to be trusted with it. You ought to be aware that, although with great circumspection, not to say timidity, Mill is an opponent of Religion in the abstract, not of any particular form of it. That is, he evidently maintains that superhuman influences on the mind of man are but a dream, whence the inevitable conclusion that all acts of devotion and prayer are but a superstition. That such is his real meaning, however darkly conveyed, is indisputable. You are well aware that it is in direct conflict with my own deepest and most cherished convictions. Yet to condemn him for holding, and for calmly publishing such views, is but to add to the

difficulties of fair and full discussion, and to render truth (or supposed truth), less certain and valuable than if it had invited, and encountered, and triumphed over every assault of every honest antagonist. I, therefore, wish Mill to be treated respectfully and handsomely."

Few of Mr. Napier's correspondents seem to have been more considerate. At one period (1844) a long time had passed without any contribution from Sir James Stephen's pen appearing in the Review. Mr. Senior wrote a hint on the subject to the editor, and Napier seems to have communicated with Sir James Stephen, who replied in a model strain.

"Have you any offer of a paper or papers from my friend John Austin? If you have, and if you are not aware what manner of man he is, it may not be amiss that you should be apprised that in these parts he enjoys, and deservedly, a very high and yet a peculiar reputation. I have a great attachment to him. He is, in the best sense of the word, a philosopher, an earnest and humble lover of wisdom. I know not anywhere a larger minded man, and yet, eloquent as he is in speech, there is, in his written style, an involution and a lack of vivacity which renders his writings a sealed book to almost every one. Whether he will be able to assume an easier and a lighter manner, I do not know. If not, I rather fear for him when he stands at your bar. All

I ask is, that you would convey your judgment in measured and (as far as you can honestly) in courteous terms; for he is, for so considerable a man, strangely sensitive. You must have an odd story to tell of your intercourse with the knights of the Order of the Quill."

And the letter closed with what an editor values more even than decently Christian treatment, namely the suggestion of a fine subject. This became the admirable essay on the Clapham Sect.

The author of one of the two or three most delightful biographies in all literature has published the letter to Mr. Napier in which Macaulay speaks pretty plainly what he thought about Brougham and the extent of his services to the Review. Brougham in turn hated Macaulay, whom he calls the third or greatest bore in society that he has ever known. He is furious—and here Brougham was certainly not wrong—over the "most profligate political morality" of Macaulay's essay on Clive.

"In my eyes, his defence of Clive, and the audacious ground of it, merit execration. It is a most serious, and, to me, a painful subject. No—no—all the sentences a man can turn, even if he made them in pure taste, and not in Tom's snip-snap taste of the lower

empire,—all won't avail against a rotten morality. The first and most sacred duty of a public man, and, above all, an author, is to keep by honest and true doctrine—never to relax—never to countenance vice—ever to hold fast by virtue. What? Are we gravely to be told, at this time of day, that a set-off may be allowed for public, and, therefore, atrocious crimes, though he admits that a common felon pleads it in vain? Gracious God, where is this to end! What horrors will it not excuse! Tiberius's great capacity, his first-rate wit, that which made him the charm of society, will next, I suppose, be set up to give a splendour to the inhabitants of Capreæ. Why, Clive's address, and his skill, and his courage are not at all more certain, nor are they qualities of a different cast. Every great ruffian, who has filled the world with blood and tears, will be sure of an acquittal, because of his talents and his success. After I had, and chiefly in the *Edinburgh Review*, been trying to restore a better, a purer, a higher standard of morals, and to wean men from the silly love of military glory, for which they are the first to pay, I find the *Edinburgh Review* preaching, not merely the old and common heresies, but ten thousand times worse, adopting a vile principle never yet avowed in terms, though too often and too much taken for a guide, unknown to those who followed it, in forming their judgments of great and successful criminals."

Of the essay on Warren Hastings he thought better, "bating some vulgarity and Macaulay's usual want of all power of reasoning." Lord

Cockburn wrote to Mr. Napier (1844) a word or two on Macaulay. "Delighting as I do," says Lord Cockburn, "in his thoughts, views, and knowledge, I feel too often compelled to curse and roar at his words and the structure of his composition. As a corrupter of style, he is more dangerous to the young than Gibbon. His seductive powers greater, his defects worse." All good critics now accept this as true. Jeffrey, by the way, speaking of the same essay, thinks that Macaulay rates Chatham too high. "I have always had an impression," he says, "(though perhaps an ignorant and unjust one), that there was more good luck than wisdom in his foreign policy, and very little to admire (except his personal purity) in any part of his domestic administration."

It is interesting to find a record, in the energetic speech of contemporary hatred, of the way in which orthodox science regarded a once famous book of heterodox philosophy. Here is Professor Sedgwick on the *Vestiges of Creation*:—

"I now know the Vestiges well, and I detest the book for its shallowness, for the intense vulgarity of

its philosophy, for its gross, unblushing materialism, for its silly credulity in catering out of every fool's dish, for its utter ignorance of what is meant by induction, for its gross (and I dare to say, filthy) views of physiology,—most ignorant and most false,—and for its shameful shuffling of the facts of geology so as to make them play a rogue's game. I believe some woman is the author; partly from the fair dress and agreeable exterior of the Vestiges: and partly from the utter ignorance the book displays of all sound physical logic. A *man* who knew so much of the surface of Physics must, at least on some one point or other, have taken a deeper plunge; but *all* parts of the book are shallow. . . . . From the bottom of my soul, I loathe and detest the Vestiges. 'Tis a rank pill of asafœtida and arsenic, covered with gold leaf. I do, therefore, trust that your contributor has stamped with an iron heel upon the head of the filthy abortion, and put an end to its crawlings. There is not one subject the author handles bearing on life, of which he does not take a degrading view."

Mr. Napier seems to have asked him to write on the book, and Sedgwick's article, the first he ever wrote for a review, eventually appeared (1845),—without, it is to be hoped, too much of the raging contempt of the above and other letters. "I do feel contempt, and, I hope, I shall express it. Rats hatched by the incubations of a goose — dogs playing dominos —

monkeys breeding men and women—all distinctions between natural and moral done away—the Bible proved all a lie, and mental philosophy one mass of folly, all of it to be pounded down, and done over again in the cooking vessels of Gall and Spurzheim!" This was the beginning of a long campaign, which is just now drawing near its close. Let us at least be glad that orthodoxy, whether scientific or religious, has mended his temper. One among other causes of the improvement, as we have already said, is probably to be found in the greater self-restraint which comes from the fact of the writer appearing in his own proper person.

VALEDICTORY.[1]

THE present number of the Review marks the close of a task which was confided to me no less than fifteen years ago—*grande mortalis ævi spatium*, a long span of one's mortal days. Fifteen years are enough to bring a man from youth to middle age, to test the working value of convictions, to measure the advance of principles and beliefs, and, alas! to cut off many early associates and to extinguish many lights. It is hardly possible that a Review should have been conducted for so considerable a time without the commission of some mistakes; articles admitted which might as well have been left out, opinions expressed which have a crudish look in the mellow light of years, phrases dropped in the heat or hurry of the moment which one would fain obliterate. Many a regret must rise in men's

[1] On the writer's retirement from the editorship of the *Fortnightly Review*, in 1882.

minds on any occasion that compels them to look back over a long reach of years. The disparity between aim and performance, the unfulfilled promise, the wrong turnings taken at critical points—as an accident of the hour draws us to take stock of a complete period of our lives, all these things rise up in private and internal judgment against anybody who is not either too stupid or too fatuously complacent to recognise facts when he sees them. But the mood passes. Time, happily, is merciful, and men's memories are benignly short.

More painful is the recollection of those earlier contributors of ours who have vanished from the world. Periodical literature is like the manna in the wilderness; it quickly loses its freshness, and to turn over thirty volumes of old Reviews can hardly be exhilarating at the best: least of all so, when it recalls friends and coadjutors who can give their help no more. George Henry Lewes, the founder of the Review, and always cordially interested in its fortunes, has not survived to see the end of the reign of his successor. His vivacious intelligence had probably done as much as he was competent to do for his genera-

tion, but there were other important contributors, now gone, of whom this could not be said. In the region of political theory, the loss of J. E. Cairnes was truly lamentable and untimely. He had, as Mill said of him, "that rare qualification among writers on political and social subjects—a genuine scientific intellect." Not a month passes in which one does not feel how great an advantage it would have been to be able to go down to Blackheath, and discuss the perplexities of the time in that genial and manly companionship, where facts were weighed with so much care, where conclusions were measured with such breadth and comprehension, and where even the great stolid idols of the Cave and the Market Place were never too rudely buffeted. Of a very different order of mind from Cairnes, but not less to be permanently regretted by all of us who knew him, was Mr. Bagehot, whose books on the English Constitution, on Physics and Politics, and the fragment on the Postulates of Political Economy, were all published in these pages. He wrote, in fact, the first article in the first number. Though himself extremely cool and sceptical about political improvement of every sort, he

took abundant interest in more ardent friends Perhaps it was that they amused him; in return his good-natured ironies put them wholesomely on their mettle. As has been well said of him, he had a unique power of animation without combat; it was all stimulus and yet no contest; his talk was full of youth, yet had all the wisdom of mature judgment (*R. H. Hutton*). Those who were least willing to assent to Bagehot's practical maxims in judging current affairs, yet were well aware how much they profited by his Socratic objections, and knew, too, what real acquaintance with men and business, what honest sympathy and friendliness, and what serious judgment and interest all lay under his playful and racy humour.

More untimely, in one sense, than any other was the death of Professor Clifford, whose articles in this Review attracted so much attention, and I fear that I may add, gave for a season so much offence six or seven years ago. Cairnes was scarcely fifty when he died, and Bagehot was fifty-one, but Clifford was only four-and-thirty. Yet in this brief space he had not merely won a reputation as a mathematician of the first order,

but had made a real mark on his time, both by the substance of his speculations in science, religion, and ethics, and by the curious audacity with which he proclaimed at the pitch of his voice on the housetops religious opinions that had hitherto been kept among the family secrets of the *domus Socratica*. It is melancholy to think that exciting work, done under pressure of time of his own imposing, should have been the chief cause of his premature decline. How intense that pressure was the reader may measure by the fact that a paper of his on *The Unseen Universe*, which filled eighteen pages of the Review, was composed at a single sitting that lasted from a quarter to ten in the evening till nine o'clock the following morning. As one revolves these and other names of eminent men who actively helped to make the Review what it has been, it would be impossible to omit the most eminent of them all. Time has done something to impair the philosophical reputation and the political celebrity of J. S. Mill; but it cannot alter the affectionate memory in which some of us must always hold his wisdom and goodness, his rare union of moral ardour with a calm and settled

mind. He took the warmest interest in this Review from the moment when I took it up, partly from the friendship with which he honoured me, but much more because he wished to encourage what was then—though it is now happily no longer—the only attempt to conduct a periodical on the principles of free discussion and personal responsibility. While recalling these and others who are no more, it was naturally impossible for me to forget the constant and valuable help that has been so freely given to me, often at much sacrifice of their own convenience, by those friends and contributors who are still with us. No conductor ever laid down his *bâton* with a more cordial and sincere sense of gratitude to those who took their several parts in his performance.

One chief experiment which the Review was established to try was that of signed articles. When Mr. Lewes wrote his Farewell Causerie, as I am doing now, he said: "That we have been enabled to bring together men so various in opinion and so distinguished in power has been mainly owing to the principle adopted of allowing each writer perfect freedom; which could

only have been allowed under the condition of personal responsibility. The question of signing articles had long been debated; it has now been tested. The arguments in favour of it were mainly of a moral order; the arguments against it, while admitting the morality, mainly asserted its inexpediency. The question of expediency has, I venture to say, been materially enlightened by the success of the Review." The success of other periodicals, conducted still more rigorously on the principle that every article ought to bear its writer's signature, leaves no further doubt on the subject; so that it is now almost impossible to realise that only fifteen or sixteen years ago scarcely anybody of the class called practical could believe that the sacred principle of the Anonymous was doomed. One of the shrewdest publishers in Edinburgh, and also himself the editor of a famous magazine, once said to me while Mr. Lewes was still editor of this Review, that he had always thought highly of our friend's judgment "until he had taken up the senseless notion of a magazine with signed articles and open to both sides of every question." Nobody will call the notion senseless any longer. The

question is rather how long the exclusively anonymous periodicals will resist the innovation.

Personally I have attached less stern importance to signature as an unvarying rule than did my predecessor; though even he was compelled by obvious considerations of convenience to make his chronique of current affairs anonymous. Our practice has been signature as the standing rule, occasionally suspended in favour of anonymity when there seemed to be sufficient reason. On the whole it may be said that the change from anonymous to signed articles has followed the course of most changes. It has not led to one-half either of the evils or of the advantages that its advocates and its opponents foretold. That it has produced some charlatanry, can hardly be denied. Readers are tempted to postpone serious and persistent interest in subjects, to a semi-personal curiosity about the casual and unconnected deliverances of the literary or social star of the hour. That this conception has been worked out with signal ability in more cases than one; that it has made periodical literature full of actuality; that it has tickled and delighted

the palate—is all most true. The obvious danger is lest we should be tempted to think more of the man who speaks than of the precise value of what he says.

One indirect effect that is not unworthy of notice in the new system is its tendency to narrow the openings for the writer by profession. If an article is to be signed, the editor will naturally seek the name of an expert of special weight and competence on the matter in hand. A reviewer on the staff of a famous journal once received for his week's task, *General Hamley on the Art of War*, a three-volume novel, a work on dainty dishes, and a translation of Pindar. This was perhaps taxing versatility and omniscience over-much, and it may be taken for granted that the writer made no serious contribution to tactics, cookery, or scholarship. But being a man of a certain intelligence, passably honest, and reasonably painstaking, probably he produced reviews sufficiently useful and just to answer their purpose. On the new system we should have an article on General Hamley's work by Sir Garnet Wolseley, and one on the cookery-book from M. Trompette. It is not certain that this is all pure

gain. There is a something to be said for the writer by profession, who, without being an expert, will take trouble to work up his subject, to learn what is said and thought about it, to penetrate to the real points, to get the same mastery over it as an advocate or a judge does over a patent case or a suit about rubrics and vestments. He is at least as likely as the expert to tell the reader all that he wants to know, and at least as likely to be free from bias and injurious prepossession.

Nor does experience, so far as it has yet gone, quite bear out Mr. Lewes's train of argument that the "first condition of all writing is sincerity, and that one means of securing sincerity is to insist on personal responsibility," and that this personal responsibility can only be secured by signing articles. The old talk of "literary bravoes," "men in masks," "anonymous assassins," and so forth, is out of date. Longer experience has only confirmed the present writer's opinion, expressed here from the very beginning: "Everybody who knows the composition of any respectable journal in London knows very well that the articles which those

of our own way of thinking dislike most intensely are written by men whom to call bravoes in any sense whatever would be simply monstrous. Let us say, as loudly as we choose, if we see good reason, that they are half informed about some of the things which they so authoritatively discuss; that they are under strong class feeling; that they have not mastered the doctrines which they are opposing; that they have not sufficiently meditated their subject; that they have not given themselves time to do justice even to their scanty knowledge. Journalists are open to charges of this kind; but to think of them as a shameless body, thirsting for the blood of better men than themselves, or ready to act as an editor's instrument for money, involves a thoroughly unjust misconception."

As to the comparative effects of the two systems on literary quality, no prudent observer with adequate experience will lay down an unalterable rule. Habit no doubt counts for a great deal, but apart from habit there are differences of temperament and peculiar sensibilities. Some men write best when they sign

what they write; they find impersonality a mystification and an incumbrance; anonymity makes them stiff, pompous, and over-magisterial. With others, however, the effect is just the reverse. If they sign, they become self-conscious, stilted, and even pretentious; it is only when they are anonymous that they recover simplicity and ease. It is as if an actor who is the soul of what is natural under the disguises of his part, should become extremely artificial if he were compelled to come upon the stage in his own proper clothes and speaking only in his ordinary voice.

The newspaper press has not yet followed the example of the new Reviews, but we are probably not far from the time when here, too, the practice of signature will make its way. There was a silly cry at one time for making the disuse of anonymity compulsory by law. But we shall no more see this than we shall see legal penalties imposed for publishing a book without an index, though that also has been suggested. The same end will be reached by other ways. Within the last

few years a truly surprising shock has been given to the idea of a newspaper, "as a sort of impersonal thing, coming from nobody knows where, the readers never thinking of the writer, nor caring whether he thinks what he writes, so long as *they* think what he writes." Of course it is still true, and will most likely always remain true, that, like the Athenian Sophist, great newspapers will teach the conventional prejudices of those who pay for it. A writer will long be able to say that, like the Sophist, the newspaper reflects the morality, the intelligence, the tone of sentiment, of its public, and if the latter is vicious, so is the former. But there is infinitely less of this than there used to be. The press is more and more taking the tone of a man speaking to a man. The childish imposture of the editorial We is already thoroughly exploded. The names of all important journalists are now coming to be as publicly known as the names of important members of parliament. There is even something over and above this. More than one editor has boldly aspired to create and educate a public of his own, and he has suc-

ceeded. The press is growing to be much more personal, in the sense that its most important directors are taking to themselves the right of pursuing an individual line of their own, with far less respect than of old to the supposed exigencies of party or the *communiqués* of political leaders. The editor of a Review of great eminence said to the present writer (who, for his own part, took a slightly more modest view) that he regarded himself as equal in importance to seventy-five Members of Parliament. It is not altogether easy to weigh and measure with this degree of precision. But what is certain is that there are journalists on both sides in politics to whom the public looks for original suggestion, and from whom leading politicians seek not merely such mechanical support as they expect from their adherents in the House of Commons, nor merely the uses of the vane to show which way the wind blows, but ideas, guidance, and counsel, as from persons of co-equal authority with themselves. England is still a long way from the point at which French journalism has arrived in this matter. We cannot count an effective host of

Girardins, Lemoinnes, Abouts, or even Cassagnacs and Rocheforts, each recognised as the exponent of his own opinions, and each read because the opinions written are known to be his own. But there is a distinctly nearer approach to this as the general state of English journalism than there was twenty years ago.

Of course nobody of sense supposes that any journalist, however independent and however possessed by the spirit of his personal responsibility, tries to form his opinions out of his own head, without reference to the view of the men practically engaged in public affairs, the temper of Parliament and the feeling of constituencies, and so forth. All these are part of the elements that go to the formation of his own judgment, and he will certainly not neglect to find out as much about them as he possibly can. Nor, again, does the increase of the personal sentiment about our public prints lessen the general working fidelity of their conductors to a party. It is their duty, no doubt, to discuss the merits of measures as

they arise. In this respect any one can see how radically they differ from the Member of Parliament, whose business is not only to discuss but to act. The Member of Parliament must look at the effect of his vote in more lights than one. Besides the merits of the given measure, it is his duty to think of the wishes of those who chose him to represent them; and if, moreover, the effect of voting against a measure of which he disapproves would be to overthrow a whole Ministry of which he strongly approves, then, unless some very vital principle indeed were involved, to give such a vote would be to prefer a small object to a great one, and would indicate a very queasy monkish sort of conscience. The journalist is not in the same position. He is an observer and a critic, and can afford, and is bound, to speak the truth. But even in his case, the disagreement, as Burke said, "will be only enough to indulge freedom, without violating concord or disturbing arrangement." There is a certain "partiality which becomes a well-chosen friendship." "Men thinking freely will, in particular instances, think differently. But still as the greater part of

the measures which arise in the course of public business are related to, or dependent on, some great leading general principles in government, a man must be peculiarly unfortunate in the choice of his political company if he does not agree with them at least nine times in ten." The doctrine that was good enough for Burke in this matter may be counted good enough for most of us. Some of the current talk about political independence is mere hypocrisy; some of it is mere vanity. For the new priest of Literature is quite as liable to the defects of spiritual pride and ambition as the old priest of the Church, and it is quite as well for him that he should be on his guard against these scarlet and high-crested sins.

The success of Reviews, of which our own was the first English type, marks a very considerable revolution in the intellectual habits of the time. They have brought abstract discussion from the library down to the parlour, and from the serious student down to the first man in the street. We have passed through a perfect cyclone of religious polemics. The popularity of such Reviews means that really large audiences, *le*

gros public, are eagerly interested in the radical discussion of propositions which twenty years ago were only publicly maintained, and then in their crudest, least true, and most repulsive form, in obscure debating societies and little secularist clubs. Everybody, male or female, who reads anything serious at all, now reads a dozen essays a year to show, with infinite varieties of approach and of demonstration, that we can never know whether there be a Supreme Being or not, whether the soul survives the body, or whether mind is more and other than a mere function of matter. No article that has appeared in any periodical for a generation back excited so profound a sensation as Mr. Huxley's memorable paper On the Physical Basis of Life, published in this Review in February 1869. It created just the same kind of stir that, in a political epoch, was made by such a pamphlet as the *Conduct of the Allies* or the *Reflections on the French Revolution.* This excitement was a sign that controversies which had hitherto been confined to books and treatises were now to be admitted to popular periodicals, and that the common man of the world would now listen

and have an opinion of his own on the bases of belief, just as he listens and judges in politics, or art, or letters. The clergy no longer have the pulpit to themselves, for the new Reviews became more powerful pulpits, in which heretics were at least as welcome as orthodox. Speculation has become entirely democratised. This is a tremendous change to have come about in little more than a dozen years. How far it goes, let us not be too sure. It is no new discovery that what looks like complete tolerance may be in reality only complete indifference. Intellectual fairness is often only another name for indolence and inconclusiveness of mind, just as love of truth is sometimes a fine phrase for temper. To be piquant counts for much, and the interest of seeing on the drawing-room tables of devout Catholics and high-flying Anglicans article after article, sending divinities, creeds, and Churches all headlong into limbo, was indeed piquant. Much of all this elegant dabbling in infidelity has been a caprice of fashion. The Agnostic has had his day with the fine ladies, like the black footboy of other times, or the spirit-rapper and table-turner of our own. What we have been

watching, after all, was perhaps a tournament, not a battle.

It would not be very easy for us now, and perhaps it would not be particularly becoming at any time, to analyse the position that has been assigned to this Review in common esteem. Those who have watched it from without can judge better than those who have worked within. Though it has been open, so far as editorial good-will was concerned, to opinions from many sides, the Review has unquestionably gathered round it some of the associations of sect. What that sect is, people have found it difficult to describe with anything like precision. For a long time it was the fashion to label the Review as Comtist, and it would be singularly ungrateful to deny that it has had no more effective contributors than some of the best-known disciples of Comte. By-and-by it was felt that this was too narrow. It was nearer the truth to call it the organ of Positivists in the wider sense of that designation. But even this would not cover many directly political articles that have appeared in our pages, and made a mark in their time. The memorable

programme of Free Labour, Free Land, Free Schools, Free Church had nothing at all Positivist about it. Nor could that programme and many besides from the same pen and others be compressed under the nickname of Academic Liberalism. There was too strong a flavour of action for the academic and the philosophic. This passion for a label, after all, is an infirmity. Yet people justly perceived that there seemed to be a certain undefinable concurrence among writers coming from different schools and handling very different subjects. Perhaps the instinct was right which fancied that it discerned some common drift, a certain pervading atmosphere, and scented a subtle connection between speculations on the Physical Basis of Life and the Unseen Universe, and articles on Trades Unions and National Education.

So far as the Review has been more specially identified with one set of opinions than another, it has been due to the fact that a certain dissent from received theologies has been found in company with new ideas of social and political reform. This suspicious combination at one time aroused considerable anger. The notion of anything like

an intervention of the literary and scientific class in political affairs touched a certain jealousy which is always to be looked for in the positive and practical man. They think as Napoleon thought of men of letters and savans:—"Ce sont des coquettes avec lesquelles il faut entretenir un commerce de galanterie, et dont il ne faut jamais songer à faire ni sa femme ni son ministre." Men will listen to your views about the Unknowable with a composure that instantly disappears if your argument comes too near to the Rates and Taxes. It is amusing, as we read the newspapers to-day, to think that Mr. Harrison's powerful defence of Trades Unions fifteen years ago caused the Review to be regarded as an incendiary publication. Some papers that appeared here on National Education were thought to indicate a deliberate plot for suppressing the Holy Scriptures in the land. Extravagant misjudgment of this kind has passed away. But it was far from being a mistake to suppose that the line taken here by many writers did mean that there was a new Radicalism in the air, which went a good deal deeper than fidgeting about an estimate or the amount of the Queen's contribution to her own

taxes. Time has verified what was serious in those early apprehensions. Principles and aims are coming into prominence in the social activity of to-day which would hardly have found a hearing twenty years ago, and it would be sufficient justification for the past of our Review if some writers in it have been instrumental in the process of showing how such principles and aims meet the requirements of the new time. Reformers must always be open to the taunt that they find nothing in the world good enough for them. "You write," said a popular novelist to one of this unthanked tribe, "as if you believed that everything is bad." "Nay," said the other, "but I do believe that everything might be better." Such a belief naturally breeds a spirit which the easy-goers of the world resent as a spirit of ceaseless complaint and scolding. Hence our Liberalism here has often been taxed with being ungenial, discontented, and even querulous. But such Liberals will wrap themselves in their own virtue, remembering the cheering apophthegm that "those who are dissatisfied are the sole benefactors of the world."

This will not be found, I think, too lofty, or too thrasonical an estimate of what has been attempted. A certain number of people have been persuaded to share opinions that fifteen years ago were more unpopular than they are now. A certain resistance has been offered to the stubborn influence of prejudice and use and wont. The original scheme of the Review, even if there had been no other obstacle, prevented it from being the organ of a systematic and constructive policy. There is not, in fact, a body of systematic political thought at work in our own day. The Liberals of the Benthamite school surveyed society and institutions as a whole; they connected their advocacy of political and legal changes with carefully formed theories of human nature; they considered the great art of Government in connection with the character of man, his proper education, his potential capacities. Yet, as we then said, it cannot be pretended that we are less in need of systematic politics than our fathers were sixty years since, or that general principles are now more generally settled even among members of the same party than they were then. The perplexities of to-day are as embarrassing as any in

our history, and they may prove even more dangerous. The renovation of Parliamentary government; the transformation of the conditions of the ownership and occupation of land; the relations between the Government at home and our adventurers abroad in contact with inferior races; the limitations on free contract and the rights of majorities to restrict the private acts of minorities; these are only some of the questions that time and circumstances are pressing upon us. These are in the political and legislative sphere alone. In Education, in Economics, the problems are as many. Yet ideas are hardly ripe for realisation. We shall need to see great schools before we can make sure of powerful parties. Meanwhile, whatever gives freedom and variety to thought, and earnestness to men's interest in the world, must contribute to a good end.

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